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The Oblate Construction of the Métis Other: Mission Ambulante among Les hivernants 1830-1880.

by

Dawn Adèle Lamothe ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts.

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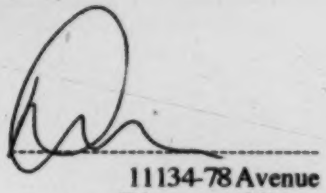

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Abstract

This thesis has as its focus the ways in which the Oblate missionaries of the North West conceptualized, understood and constructed the plains Métis. When the Oblates of Mary Immaculate were dispatched to the North West of what is now Canada, they arrived with specific ideas and perspectives of the world and their goals. The Métis, the children of European fathers and Indian mothers, were a crucial component of the Oblate mission. They already showed signs of a separate identity distinct from either parentage and many of the French Métis had been exposed to Catholicism through their fathers and in some cases even remembered prayers that had been recited. The Métis and the Oblates shared a language, a religious experience, and the difficulties of surviving in a harsh climate. It is the Métis and Oblate relationship that this thesis is concerned with, in particular the relationship between the wintering plains Métis and those Oblate fathers who followed them to these remote hivernant camps. As John Foster has noted, a fundamental aspect of Métis identity was forged on the plains in the wintering camps, as this was where the Métis developed an economic niche and further solidified their identity.

The context of this investigation is therefore the wintering parties or 'hivernants' which became more frequent on the plains as the buffalo receded to the West and an economic opportunity developed. Large groups of Métis began wintering on the plains for more protracted periods after the 1830s. It was usual that the Métis left their homes at least twice a year during the summer and fall for hunting expeditions, but permanent wintering on the plains became more frequent in the 1840s. As a result, the missionary Oblates experienced a crisis in their evangelizing efforts as they had no recipients for their services. Several adventurous missionaries among the Oblates felt the need to extend their services and began wintering with the Métis hunting parties and stayed with the expeditions throughout

the winter period. This community experience then is the setting for an investigation of the Oblate views of the Métis.

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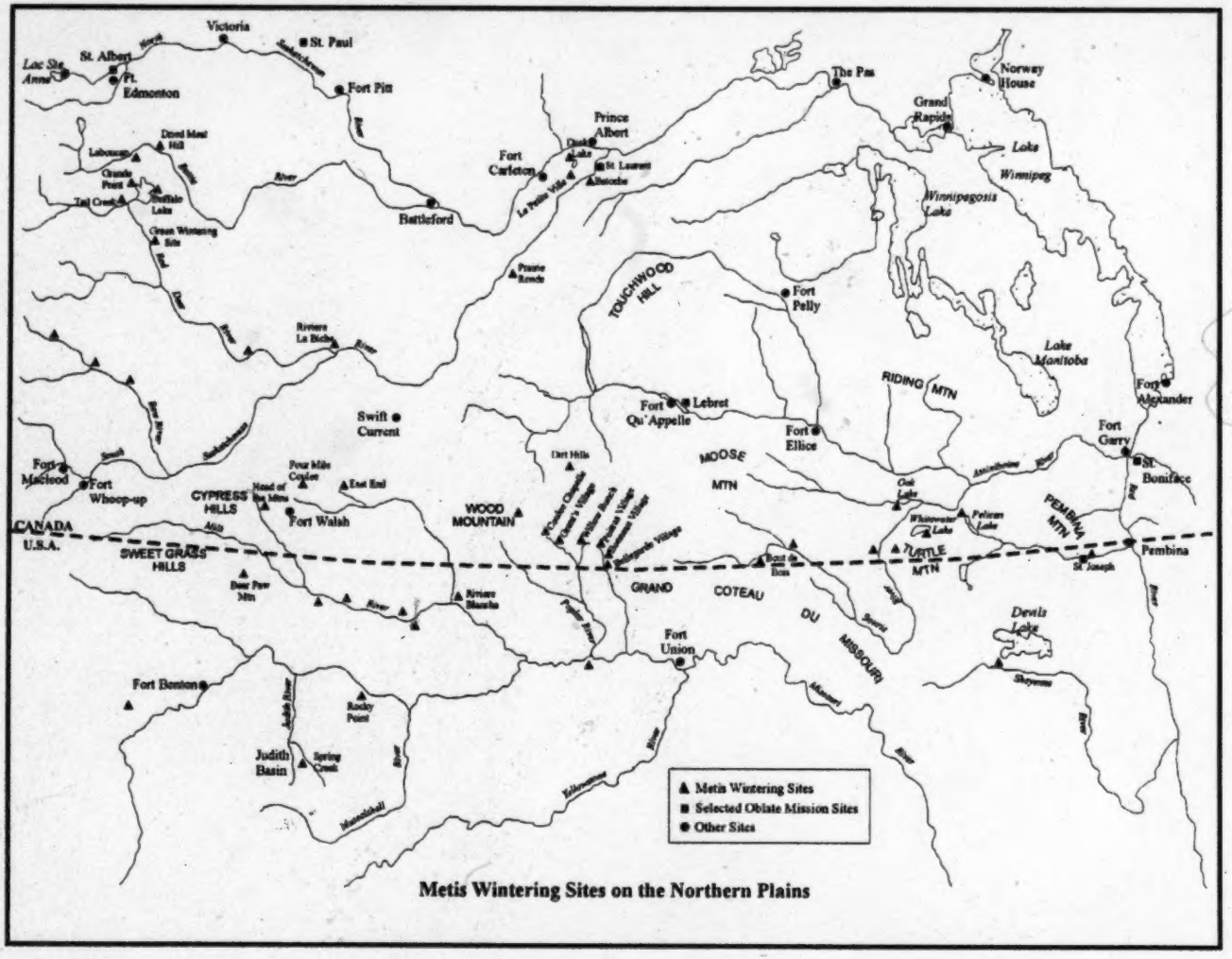

Metis Wintering Sites on the Northern Plains

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis has as its focus the ways in which the Oblate missionaries of the North West conceptualized, understood and constructed the plains Métis. When the Oblates of Mary Immaculate were dispatched to the North West of what is now Canada, they arrived with specific ideas and perspectives of the world and their goals. The Métis, the children of European fathers and Indian mothers, were a crucial component of the Oblate mission. They already showed signs of a separate identity distinct from either parentage and many of the French Métis had been exposed to Catholicism through their fathers and in some cases even remembered prayers that had been recited. The Métis and the Oblates shared a language, a religious experience, and the difficulties of surviving in a harsh climate. It is the Métis and Oblate relationship that this thesis is concerned with, in particular the relationship between the wintering plains Métis and those Oblate fathers who followed them to these remote hivernant camps. As John Foster has noted, a fundamental aspect of Métis identity was forged on the plains in the wintering camps, as this was where the Métis developed an economic niche and further solidified their identity.

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throughout the winter period. This community experience then is the setting for an investigation of the Oblate views of the Métis.

This study is not intended to address how the Métis responded to Oblate constructions; it is undertaken to delve into what the sources described as commonly held beliefs about the Métis. The sources were studied in order to question and analyze the very constructions of Métis identity at the time they were being formed.

This study is not the first to investigate either the Métis nor the Oblates. A comprehensive study of the Métis was written in 1945 by Marcel Giraud. His Le Métis Canadien[1] remains the most exhaustive work on the Métis, their origins, and their role in the Canadian landscape. Furthermore, the Oblates have been studied both as individuals and as a group in works like Raymond Huel's Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and the Métis,[2] and Martha McCarthy's From the Great River to the Ends of the Earth: Oblate Missions to the Dene, 1847-1921.[3] But it was not until John E. Foster that the scholarship changed to focus Métis and the Oblate in a dynamic relationship on a small scale. John E. Fosters' work on the Oblate missionary and the Métis chef was fundamental to notions of using the Oblate records to understand the intense and important relationship between individual Oblates and small groups of Métis hunters set in a particular context. In Foster's "Le Missionnaire and Le Chef Métis,"[4] a complex relationship between the missionary and the hunting chef is investigated and identified as significant to the development of a Métis identity. Foster's work is the foundation for the approach of this work and to the materials collected.

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[1] Marcel Giraud, Le Métis Canadien, 2 vols (St. Boniface: Les Éditions de Blé, 1984, reprinted from 1945).
[2] Raymond Huel, Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and the Métis (Alberta: University of Alberta, 1996).
[3] Martha McCarthy, From the Great River to the Ends of the Earth: Oblate Missions to the Dene, 1847-1921 (Edmonton: Western Canadian Publishers and the University of Alberta, 1995).
[4] John Foster, "Le Missionnaire and Le Chef Métis," Western Oblate Studies I, (May 1989).

Sources were examined not to gather further details of life in these wintering camps, but rather to unpack the views the Oblate had of the Métis. The data was collected for the period 1830s-1880s and consisted of the written correspondences from wintering fathers to their superior. The investigation involved five known winterers including Albert Lacombe, Jean-Marie Lestanc, Alexis André, Jean-Marie LeFloc'h and Jules Decorby, and most of their letters written from wintering sites to the superior were studied with the hope of establishing how these Oblates constructed a Métis 'other'. In studying the Oblate writings about the hivernants, it became apparent that there were differences in Oblate construction of 'Métiness'. What emerged upon close examination of the Oblate sources was an internal conflict between Oblates who had wintered among the Métis and Oblates who had not.

The Oblates who wintered among the Métis constructed a Métis identity, based on their experiences, that was positive and praiseworthy. On the other hand, the Oblates who were more at arms length, constructed a Métis identity much more prone to criticism of the Métis. But the practice of 'constructing' an identity and then in turn placing that construction onto another was what the Oblates were involved in. Though there may have been differentiations between the constructions depending on their experiences, the Oblates were involved in defining the Métis in accordance with their personal, Oblate, and European beliefs.

The use of the term 'construction' to designate the way in which the Oblates understood the plains Métis recognizes that the concept of 'Métis' is not a category that can be conceptualized in terms of universals whose content is an immutable definition. While the 19th century Métis clearly had a concept of themselves, outsiders like the Oblates also created them as 'discursive objects'. Influenced by the intellectual trends of the day and their own evangelizing mission, they, through their writings, constructed the discursive 'other'. In carrying out this activity, the Oblates interpreted specific Métis behaviors in a

certain fashion and placed a value on those behaviors. Furthermore, the missionaries were involved in an overt action of influencing other outsider views of the Métis.

In order to understand what determined the Oblate constructions of Métis identity, each of the contexts which affected the way the Métis were being viewed was examined. The chapter on the wintering experience describes the goals, ways of life, and adaptations of the plains Métis. It explains why the Métis were wintering for prolonged periods, what adjustments and adaptations they underwent to succeed in the winter hunts, and their underlying reasons for such a shift. The nature of life on the plains is examined in detail and the incredible skill that the Métis possessed is revealed. The challenges faced by those involved in the wintering experience set the stage for the very unique relationship which evolved and thus affected the way the Oblates viewed the Métis. Another chapter deals with the "Mission Ambulante" which was the Oblate aspect of the wintering experience. The exceptional nature of the five aforementioned Oblates is discussed with explanations as to the rationale behind wintering among the Métis. The ultimate success of the winter mission and the characters of all five Oblates are assessed. As the wintering community is the context for the entire study this is of significant interest. Who was involved, why they were wintering, when were they active in wintering, what wintering was in practice, and where they were journeying every winter are all addressed in this chapter. Furthermore, the fundamental conflict which evolved is discussed and examined. In addition the relative success of the "Mission Ambulante" is investigated. Finally, the fifth chapter of the body deals with actual source material from the various Oblates in this study and addresses differentiations in information and in 'constructions'. This section is divided thematically based on the major themes discovered in the source material. Nomadism, hybridity, and notions of civilization versus savagery are all examined as they pertain to the material and the way these ideas affected the Oblate creation of the 'discursive object'.

The intellectual premises that informed the Oblate views of the Métis were predominantly concepts of civilization/savagery, and nomadism. These concepts were defined in European terms of sedentarism and Christianity, and these terms defined human development. The goal was to examine and unpack or deconstruct how the Métis were constructed by the Oblates based on these predetermined notions of civilization. As Ania Loomba states in Colonialism/Postcolonialism, "misrepresentations or constructions need to be unraveled rather than simply attributed to some timeless, unchanging notion of racism."[5] This perspective on unraveling the colonial 'other' provides the method from which to interpret the Oblate record.

The other perspective that was useful in disentangling Oblate views of the Métis was Robert J.C Young's Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race. This study provided interpretations of how the Oblates viewed the Métis within the context of their mixed ancestry and their race. For example, Young speaks of the mid 1800s as a time when "Fear of miscegenation can be related to the notion that without such racial hierarchy, civilization would, in literal as well as technical sense, collapse." Thus "the equation of the white race with civilization (and, as we have seen, of civilization as the cause of whiteness) makes it clear why it was so important during the nineteenth century for the Egyptians not to have been black."[6] Intellectuals across the board were discussing notions of miscegenation, hybridity, fertility among mixed groups, and how culture, race and civilization were all tied into a way of understanding the world. In the case of the missionaries, concepts of hybridity were mixed with definitions of civilization. For instance, from Young's perspective some Oblates might have viewed the Métis as more prone to civilization based on their mixed blood. Even the idea that behavioral characteristics, such as indolence, were associated with the mixed ancestry of the Métis, seemed appropriate

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[5] Ania Loomba, Colonialism/Postcolonialism (New York:Routledge, 1998), p.110.
[6] Robert Young, Colonial Desire :Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race (New York:Routledge, 1995).

considering the time and the intellectual climate. Culture, race and civilization were perhaps, if not preconceived, then at least foremost in the minds of the Oblates prior to their arrival.

The intense nature of the wintering life suggests that these experiences might represent a different perspective than the sources written in a regular mission setting. The context of the relationship between the Métis and the wintering Oblate missionary was indicative of some change in interpretation and construction of a Métis identity. The sources indicated a difference in tone and construction between what is termed the 'insider' Oblate, one privy to the wintering community, and the 'outsider' Oblate, one not exposed to the wintering experience. The context of the wintering community and its inherent adventures produced an altered construction of the Métis, that though discernible through the Oblate letters, had little chance of complete dissemination and legitimation in the world at large. The Métis 'other' constructed by those Oblates in wintering camps has had little exposure. What has been adopted as the discursive object has been the construction by the 'outsider' Oblate. This study will present an alternative construction, one perhaps more in keeping with how those Métis may have viewed themselves.

Chapter 2: Historiography

The study of Canadian history with all of its actors' categories, ethnic groups and regional differences has allowed for a diverse and changeable experience of history. Each group has its important place and the interactions between groups affect the historical development of the whole. The plains Métis[1], as a group, have been widely studied. Similarly, the Oblats de Marie Immaculée, or Oblates, whose history is closely related to that of the Métis, have also been examined and investigated within the context of missiology, the study of missions, and perhaps even hagiography, the study of saints. But the general subject of Oblate and Métis relations has been little studied.[2] Perhaps the subject of Oblate and Métis relations has little to add to our understanding of Canadian history, and thus has remained unexamined. Or, perhaps relationships between two diverse groups, such as the Métis and the Oblates, are too convoluted to ascertain using a historical method. The question remains: why has the subject of the dynamic of Métis and Oblate relations not been studied in any detail?

It is difficult to imagine that the interaction or relationship between the Oblates, the dominant Catholic missionaries in the North West from 1830s onwards, and the plains Métis could be of little import to our understanding of Canadian history. Just as any actor plays a part in the overall outcome of the historical record, so does every group. No single group should be omitted from a thorough historical investigation. Thus, it follows that the

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[1]The Métis were the descendants of men of the fur trade and Native mothers. As many of the early fur-traders were from French Canada or France, some of the descendants are of French origin. They were known as "half-breeds", "bois-brulées" but mostly they were called Métis, which means "mixed" in French. Rather than living as Indians or as whites in their communities, a unique ethnic identity developed in some localities.

[2]The few exceptions include Raymond Huel's Proclaiming the Gospel to Indians and Métis (Edmonton: University of Alberta, 1996), which will be dealt with later in this chapter; Annick,N. The Métis of the South Saskatchewn, Manuscript Report Number 364, 2 vols (Ottawa Parks Canada, 1976); and Diane

relationship between groups can only serve to enhance our depth of understanding of Canadian history. After all, the dialectic created by two groups alters each group, affecting how the groups view each other and themselves within the context of history. The manner in which one group perceives another effectively alters both how that group sees itself and how others see it and is of interest to both histories and contemporary views.

The subject of Métis /Oblate relations and how those relations affected the historical landscape is not only important to the broader topic of Canadian history, but the subject is intrinsically valuable. Both the Métis and the Oblates were permanently altered by not only the others presence but further by the dynamic they created, perpetually altering their own and each others histories. A study of Métis/Oblate relations also raises questions regarding the role of religion in Métis identity, the possible effects the Catholic clergy had on such important events as the Riel rebellions, and finally European perceptions of Métis ethnicity.

Thus, it is not that the subject of Oblate/Métis relations is of no import, but rather that the difficulty of the subject matter has deterred the scholarship. The inherent difficulty of writing and researching this relationship is at least twofold. First, the histories of each group must be comprehensively studied within its field. Both groups need to be known and characterized with a level of expertise and confidence before the interstices between the groups can be understood. In the case of both the Métis and the Oblates, volumes of information have been written and researched. Second, the sources used to determine the dynamic between the two must be read with a new approach. It is as though the focus of the research is neither the Métis, nor the Oblates, but a third and powerful force: the dynamic created by their interaction. This dynamic requires an in-depth understanding of both players, which is probably why, the question has not been broached in prior scholarship.

Payment, The Free People-Otispemisiwak: Batoche, Saskatchewan 1870-1930 (Ottawa: National Historic Parks and Sites: 1990).

Some of the recent scholarly investigations on Oblate missions to the Northern Indians of Canada help clarify and identify new research agendas for Métis/Oblate relations. This literature offers insight into the multiple angles from which to view the contact, development, and relationship between the Natives and missionaries over time. Without a sense of both the contributions and gaps in this literature it is difficult to pinpoint exactly how this approach will differ and how it will fill the void.

John Webster Grant's Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounters since 1534 [3] marks the beginning of a new critical approach to the topic of missionaries and Natives in Canada. As a church historian Grant uses historical methodology to study the missions and encounters between Indians and European missionaries since first contact in 1534. This was a watershed in the historiography because prior to Grant's work, most historical writings on missionary encounters with Natives were hagiographical, praising the works of the missionary, or missiologies, which limited the potential scope of the works. Here, in Grant's work, we have the beginnings of broad interpretations and a rigorous historical method. In terms of the use of Oblate sources, John Webster Grant actually pieces together a narrative that broaches some of the more important questions regarding missions and missionaries that subsequent historians have tried to answer. For instance, notions of agency and the question of responsibility within the context of culture contact are made explicit in this quote:

> To think of encounter between Christianity and the Indians of Canada is almost inevitably to conjure up a picture of dominant missionaries gathering Indians around them, collecting them into villages, and forcing on them a strange religion and alien culture. This picture captures an element of painful reality, but it is unfair not only to the missionaries but to the Indians: recognizing only the former as actors, it reduces the latter to the role of passive recipients.[4]

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[3] John Webster Grant, Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter since 1534 (Toronto: University of Toronto press, 1984).

[4] John Webster Grant, Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and Indians of Canada in Encounter since 1534, p. 239.

Moreover, with notions of Native agency, the larger questions of Native resilience and resistance are hinted at and brought to light. As active participants and no longer passive bystanders, questions of how Natives displayed any kind of cultural and spiritual resilience are now at the forefront of scholarly focus. The analysis of the interplay of contact began to give due credit to the influence of both actors. Along with notions of resilience, out and out resistance to European ideas, religion, and lifestyles were used to probe the available sources for a new and more comprehensive approach. It would be naive to assume that the mission was successful in its aggressive attempt to effectively alter the Indians' religious and cultural world view. As well, resilience and resistance occurred sometimes with success, sometimes without, and the new approach provided the foundation to delve into cases and situations where European ideas were contested. John Webster Grant's Moon of Wintertime brought to the forefront all these fundamental issues with which historians are still wrestling

Grant's work, though it brought to light many previously overlooked issues, still focused on encounters between the Europeans and the Natives over a long period of time. The converse of that approach is to investigate historical and anthropological sources in order to understand the Natives and their lifeways prior to the arrival of Europeans. The focus is quite distinct. The one draws our attention to the continuity of time, as per the written European standard of history. The other, properly known as an ethnohistory induces us to understand that life and time existed prior to and after the arrival and first contact with Europeans. But this latter approach and perspective requires the available sources to be used differently to adapt to changing historiographical demands.

In Drum Songs[5], Kerry Abel takes a different approach to Oblate sources. Utilizing the insights and methods of ethnohistory she ventures into an investigation of Dene life and

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[5] Kerry Abel, Drum Songs: Glimpses of Dene History (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993).

spirituality.[6] The subtitle of the book, Glimpses of Dene History, alludes to the diverging focus from both hagiographical and missiology writings. This book is an ethnohistory, a history using historical and anthropological methods to investigate a particular culture group over a specific time frame. But, Abel is not only interested in the Dene, she is also interested in the dynamic created between the missionary and the potential Dene convert. She argues that the Dene, despite European contact, trading patterns, and missionary influences, were able to maintain a 'Dene' identity which has persisted to the present. The Oblates were really only one of many economic, religious, and political groups affecting the Dene identity. Abel uses the Oblate writings to examine Dene resistance to external pressures such as Catholicism, and in so doing provides a clear example of how Oblate sources can be used in innovative ways.

This different use of sources to address changing questions illustrates the need for distinct interpretive approaches. In Drum Songs, though Abel applies the notions of resilience and resistance, she takes her interpretation one step further. Abel introduces, by the very use of an ethnohistoric method, the notion of accommodation. Accommodation within the context of culture contact presupposes the perspective of the Natives and therefore requires a knowledge of Native society both prior to and after contact. This approach assumes Native agency by arguing that Northern Natives made conscious decisions to integrate or accommodate both European ideas and people. In the case of the Dene, the adaptations made were clearly of their own free will. According to Abel:

> As the Dene bands encountered foreign political, economic, religious, and social systems, they attempted to choose what they found desirable in those systems and to reject what they disliked.[7]

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[6] For more information outlining the methodolgy and problems with the study of ethnohistory see Bruce Trigger, "Ethnohistory: Problems and Prospects," Ethnohistory 29 (1982 (1):1-19).

[7] Kerry Abel, Drum Songs: Glimpses of Dene History, p. 265.

The use of the word 'accommodation' implies that the Dene were willingly altering their world view or perspective because of the introduction of another world view. This raises the issue of 'syncretism' which alludes to an even deeper process. Syncretism implies that a unique world view is created. The constructed viewpoint is made of carefully selected ideas which are seen, assessed, accepted and then integrated into an old idea. Thus, while accommodation is specifically concerned with the alterations one culture makes in contact with another, syncretism distinguishes the creation of a third, new perspective. This type of approach recognizes a cultural dialectic underway and brings us closer to identifying the gaps in the scholarship and the complexities of Oblate/Métis relations. Contact may not be simply a matter of rejecting or accepting another outlook, but rather a matter of integrating the old and the new into a completely different paradigm.

Martha McCarthy's From the Great River to the Ends of the Earth: Oblate Missions to the Dene, 1847-1921[8] examines Oblate missions, in a similar light as Abel. She focuses on the proselytizer, the proselytized, and the dynamic created between the two. Though the group being studied is the Dene of the Mackenzie-Athabasca region, her focus is nonetheless the interrelationship or interstices between the two groups. McCarthy's choice of the period under study (1847-1921), spans the time frame from the arrival of the first Oblate to the signing of Treaty 11 in 1921, but her research is much more than a chronology of events affecting both the Oblates and the Dene. In fact, her particular approach focuses on the accommodations and their subsequent changes in order to adjust to each other, although accommodation and adjustment did not take place in every instance. This notion of the Oblates accommodating and adjusting as much as the Dene is of particular relevance to this study. McCarthy's approach is supported by a combination of oral and written sources. Thus not one particular history dominates; a syncretism of Native

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[8] Martha McCarthy, From the Great River to the Ends of the Earth: Oblate Missions to the Dene, 1847-1921 (Edmonton: Western Canadian Publishers and the University of Alberta, 1995).

and Oblate worldviews is created. The end result is a better understanding of each distinctive group through a thorough investigation of adaptations made by both.

Unlike Abel, McCarthy focuses on the institutions where cultural contact and exchange occurred. The dominant structures were the Hudson's Bay Company, the Oblats de Marie Immaculées, and the Church Missionary Society, which represented the Anglican Church. In essence, McCarthy develops a dialogue between European culture and the Dene in an attempt to show how each of these two particular cultures negotiated the presence of the other. Her thesis reflects just such a dialectic. Neither culture dominated the other; both were being negotiated, and both were agents rather than passive victims.

These works raise and answer important questions. The notion of agency clarifies an entirely different perspective from the past hagiographical or missiological methods and this new outlook gives rise to subsequent questions. If the Indian was an active agent, then what process did he/she undergo to successfully address European incursion? Concepts such as 'accommodation' to European ideas, and 'syncretism' of both European and Native lifeways deepen our awareness to this question. Finally, and most consequentially, the very questions raised and partially answered draw our attention to the gaps in the scholarship. When Europeans came and interacted with Natives, the dynamic of that association cycled back into each respective group, permanently altering it. The question to be asked is how did the dynamic of that European/ Native relationship re-integrate into each group, and how did it enduringly modify them?

The Oblates had not been investigated and researched by a professional historian for the singular purpose of understanding their missiology until Raymond Huel's Proclaiming

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the Gospel to the Indians and Métis.[9] Huel, using some individual accounts, traces the development of the mission from its inception in 1830 to the present. This extensive study however, is mostly about the Oblate missions and how over time they altered their responses toward the Indians and Métis. Not unlike Abel's focus on the Dene's response to European incursion, Huel takes a similar approach vis-à-vis the Oblates. What ensues is a history of the Oblates and their institutions.

According to Huel, the institutions created by the Oblates to carry out their purposes among the Indians and Métis are no different than those described by previous authors; but their development is distinctively explained. Because of the time frame, from the 1830s to the present, a sense of evolution emerges. Huel's exposition shows how lessons were learnt by certain Oblate Fathers and later applied in their next adventure or challenge. For example he states:

> What was the essence of Christianity? The answer to these fundamental questions required a critical examination of Oblate missiology, activities and objectives. This evaluation and subsequent directives were designed to transform Christianity into a more meaningful and expression of spirituality for Natives. . .[10]

The evolution of Oblate interaction with the Métis is an example of 'accommodation' and 'adaptation' but this time on the part of the proselytizer. Missionaries entered the field thinking that a Roman Catholic idea of religion could be successfully transferred, unaffected, into any part of the world. Their necessary adaptation and accommodation shows an acknowledged deviation from that rigid construct. The realities of the mission were forcing the Oblates and their superiors to adjust, accommodate, and adapt to the geography, lifeways, and spirituality of the mission context.

A good example of an accommodation made by the Oblates is the "mission ambulante" which was when the Oblate Father followed his flock by being a mobile

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[9] Raymond Huel, Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and Métis (Alberta: University of Alberta, 1996).
[10] Ibid., p.175.

mission himself. Permanent missions did not always enhance Indian and Métis lifestyles. The migratory nature of Indian bands made missions and their goals unattainable. At certain times of the year the mission was successful and busy, and at other times failing and slow. Inevitably, the result was inconsistent. Furthermore, the transportation of European goods and supplies to the missions was unreliable and expensive. But the "mission ambulante" overcame all of these challenges. Not only did the Indian and Métis hunting parties provide the supplies required to support the Oblate Fathers' work, but they also built churches and living quarters. The hunting party benefited from the social cohesion provided by the Father, and the Father had a consistent long term ministry which was not impeded by seasonal and migratory changes.[11] In the case of the "mission ambulante", both the Indian and Métis hunting bands and certain individual Oblates adapted to the demands of the harsh climate and scarcity of resources in order to attain a high level of co-operation that was mutually beneficial.

According to Huel the "mission ambulante" is a crucial interstitial point but given the nature of the interests and questions of this thesis, Huel's analysis is neither extensive nor detailed enough. The dynamic between the Oblate and the Métis in the "mission ambulante" was an intense bonding and at once divisive relationship which occurred during their seasonal hunts and is of significant importance to a study and research of Métis, Oblate and any inter-related history. Within the context of this particular missionary and Métis endeavor lies a wealth of information and insight.

Huel's work moved us further along the path of understanding. The concepts of accommodation, adaptation, and syncretism, exemplified in previous scholarship, were now applied to the other portion of the dynamic: the missionary. The missionary had to flex and move with the demands of cultural difference just as the Indians and Métis did.

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[11] Ibid., p.54.

The Oblates, as a group, were composed of a multitude of individuals who had various ethnic backgrounds, interests, vocations, or goals. The deconstruction of a supposedly homogeneous group into different parts or identities is a methodology that has not yet been applied in this particular area of study. For insight into the inner workings of any group, one must turn to the individuals comprising the group.

This focus on individuals can be found to some extent in Robert Choquette's the Oblate Assault on Canada's North West,[12] another example of a distinct methodology. Choquette is concerned with how each individual player affected the entire mission. What is useful about this strategy is that it gives a sense of what players were involved and how their actions, motivations, and personalities affected the greater project. This helps us to understand the mission within the context of the individual missionaries.

Perhaps Choquette, by depicting individual Oblates involved in a particular project, seeks to show how personality played its part in the overall development of the mission and the history. This aspect of the book is its strength, because the individual and his or her behavior and attitude is viewed as consequential within the larger mission. For instance, the issues plaguing Father Petitot affected the success and dynamic of his particular mission:

> In the final months of 1865, one year after Father Petitot's arrival in Good Hope, it was said among the Indians and traders that Petitot was an active homosexual or a pedophile, his preferred-but not exclusive-partner being a fifteen-year-old Indian boy. . .Bishop Faraud called the priest to account. . .(he) begged forgiveness, and promised to correct his ways...however, six months later, the apostolic vicar was stunned to learn that Petitot was traveling throughout the vast mission territory in the company of the same boy[13]

The specificity of individual action, group dynamics created by the individuals, and how all these details were negotiated while trying to overcome seemingly insurmountable problems, are fundamental to understanding the missions. Choquette presents a group history over an

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[12] Robert Choquette, The Oblate Assault on Canada's North West (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1995).
[13] Ibid., p.63.

extended period of time without losing sight of the specific actors and the challenges facing them.

Choquette's book is a particular genre of history. Though he is a trained historian, he is nonetheless an Oblate and writes within that tradition. This genre of history provides an opportunity for insight while simultaneously limiting the author's interpretations. On the one hand, this is no different than any historian who is affected by his own internal reality and the beliefs he holds, but in the case of Choquette, he is writing a history of an organization he himself is a member of. Although the resulting work offers insight into a system from which the majority of his readers are excluded, the perceptiveness he has acquired is limiting. Interestingly, most insider works focus on individual Oblates, their biographies, and how these individuals contributed to the greater whole. Without the insiders perspective, the scholarship would be left lacking.

Another such work is Donat Levasseur's Les Oblats de Marie Immaculée dans l'ouest at le nord du Canada, 1845-1967.[14] Levasseur, an Oblate archivist, is not a trained historian. Levasseur covers the development of Oblate missions by looking at each geographical area and highlights the development, events and individual Oblates who served each mission. The book is largely a chronology of Oblate initiatives. While these types of histories provide little new in the overall interpretation of the Oblates, they do provide an invaluable introduction to the Oblate perspective necessary to this study. The organization of the Oblats de Marie Immaculée has had a reasonably extensive insider tradition. Though their more contemporary writers are historians, their predecessors were Oblates in the field and their work may be interpreted as such. In other words, all Oblate works provide a broad base from which to understand the Oblate perspective.

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[14] Donat Levasseur o.m.i., Les Oblats de Marie Immaculée dans l'ouest et le nord du Canada, 1845-1967 (Edmonton: Western Candian Publishers, 1995).

A.G. Morice's Histoire de l'église Catholique dans l'ouest Canadien du Lac Supérieure au Pacifique (1659-1905)[15] is an example of another source of Oblate knowledge. Morice, also an Oblate, covers a broad range of time and space by framing his volumes between 1659 and 1905 and by including almost all developments from coast to coast. Moreover, his subject is not only the Oblates but the entire Catholic clergy. Interestingly he incorporates in his approach many stories of individual incidents which makes his history more of a narrative than a strict biographical perusal.

The three works by Morice, Levasseur, and Choquette are all secondary sources whose data was drawn from primary sources or information written at the time. Despite the breadth of information coming from within the Oblate tradition, and the usefulness of these secondary sources, the perspective sought for this thesis has been missed or incompletely gathered. What the Oblate thought, felt or assumed was not transmitted. In fact, much of these intangible elements of Oblate and Métis relations, while sometimes intuited and suggested, are more often hidden. Therefore, the secondary and primary sources must be re-visited and combed for what was perhaps not said, but was telling of the nature of Métis/Oblate relations.

Thus the best place to start in elucidating the Oblate perspective is the fairly large amount of writing produced by the Oblates in the field. These writings provide information on the experiences and motivations of individual Oblates and missions, and they fill the gaps in Oblate activities in the West. Early examples of this sort are Alexandre Taché's Vingts Années de missions dans le Nord-Ouest de l'Amérique,[16] a biography of Henri Faraud based on his writings entitled Dix-huit ans chez les Sauvages: voyages et missions dans l'Extreme Nord de l'Amérique britannique,[17] and a reminiscence of missionary

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[15] A.G. Morice o.m.i. Histoire de l'église Catholique dans l'ouest Canadien du Lac Supérieure au Pacifique (1659-1905) (Montreal: Granger Freres, 1915).

[16] Alexandre Taché, Vingt années de missions dans le nord-ouest de l'Amérique (Montreal: E Sénécal, 1866).

[17] Henri Faraud, Dix-huit ans chez les sauvages (Paris: R. Ruffet, 1866).

experiences by Bishop Émile Grouard called Souvenirs d'un missionaire en Colombie britannique.[18] These historical works have been used mainly for what they say of the author's views.

Given that this topic deals with intersticial issues between the Oblates and the Métis, it is also necessary to examine the historiography of the Métis. In fact, the similarities between the Oblate constructions of Métis identity and the pursuant scholarly adoption of Oblate constructions, prove to be uncanny.

The 1930s mark a watershed in the way the Métis were portrayed by Canadian historians. Although they had been the subject of some scholarly work previously, they had been seen largely in the context of French/English relations in Canada or as minor impediments in the move from colony to Nation. The Great Depression changed this as more economic approaches came into vogue, and as it seemed the Métis as a group were doomed to oblivion. The Depression had significantly exacerbated the ever-growing poverty and social problems affecting the Métis, who unlike status Indians, had no access to government relief and assistance. Their poverty was such that in 1935, the Ewing Commission was established to investigate the Métis situation in Alberta. Similarly, Métis Organizations developed in response to growing discontent and disillusionment concerning the government and its role in the lives of this particular group of people.

This was the context within which George F.G. Stanley wrote The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions.[19] The Métis were an integral part of Stanley's work. While Stanley retained a focus on the building of the Canadian Nation by examining the two Riel Rebellion, as he termed them, he placed the Métis at the center of the story framed by the frontier relationship of encroaching civilization. He asserts that the Rebellions

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[18] Émile Grouard, Souvenirs de mes soixantes and d'Apostolat dans l'Athabaska-Mackenzie (Winnipeg, La Liberté, entre 1920-1930).

[19] George F.G. Stanley, The Birth of Western Canada: A history of the Riel Rebellions (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1936).

within the Western Canadian context were . . . "the clash between primitive and civilized peoples,"[20] which were similar to clashes occurring in other parts of the world with European Imperialism. This approach, while liberating the Métis from the straight jacket of French/English relations, was not that far removed from the ethnocentric beliefs of the Oblates who had ministered to the Métis in the 19th century.

This theme of the conflict of barbarism and civilization, first emphasized in Stanley's work, was adopted by Marcel Giraud in his two volume study published in 1945.[21] Giraud, like Stanley used missionary accounts and characterizations of the Métis to attempt to understand their plight. According to Giraud the Métis way of life was essentially doomed to fail as an onslaught of Ontario English-speaking Protestants arrived in the West. Giraud felt that Métis reluctance to adapt to agriculture activity and full settlement was a characteristic specifically tied to their mixed race ancestry rather than a purely survivalistic and environmental adaptation.

Marcel Giraud's two volume study of the Métis was the first of its kind. It is a thorough and comprehensive perusal of the plains Métis, their lifeways, their adaptations to European incursion, and an attempted explanation of their subsequent dispersal after Confederation. Unlike other works, it is concerned solely with the Métis people and explains the development of a Métis identity in the 18th and 19th centuries. Despite its weaknesses, Giraud's work nonetheless pioneered the study of Métis history without having it be dominated by either Canadian history or Western history. It is effectively the first in-depth work on the origins of the Métis in fur trade practices and it provides glimpses of the way the Métis were viewed at the time Giraud was writing, but also reflected an older 19th century anthropological concept of miscegenation.

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[20] Ibid., p vii.

[21] Marcel Giraud, Le Métis Canadien, 2 Volumes (St. Boniface: Les Éditions de Blé, 1984, reprinted from 1945).

But the view taken of the Métis in Le Métis Canadien[22] raises some issues. Giraud portrayed the Métis as being victims of both barbaric environmental influences and Indian inherited characteristics. This essentialist view was prevalent before W.W.II and seems to coincide with the writing of Le Métis Canadien, though it was published after the war. Giraud tends to vacillate between giving the Métis full conscious choice on the one hand, and imposing genetic limitations on the other. The tension is never really resolved and the Métis, to Giraud, remain a lost and doomed people unable to either assimilate completely, or survive independently. Le Métis Canadien makes assumptions about the 'general' Métis character that to the contemporary reader resembles bigotry. The point is explicit here when Giraud states:

> On ne saurait dire si ces qualités s'attenuaient en eux, sous l'éffet de l'indolence latente du tempérament indigène qui, dans la formation qu'ils recevaient de leur mère, se communiquait peut-etre aux enfants métis.[23]
>
> It would be hard to say if these qualities in them were softened, under the effects of a latent idleness from their indigenous temperaments which, from their mothers' influence, was communicated to the métis children.
>
> Elles laisserent les deux races se fréquenter sans entrave, et demeurèrent indifférentes au sort des jeunes métis qui grandissaient, livrés à leurs mères, loins des principes et de l'idéal de la société civilisée.[24]
>
> The mothers left the two races to mingle without hindrance and they remained indifferent to the fate of the young métis growing up, left with their mothers, far from any principles and the ideals of civilized society.

What Giraud is suggesting in both quotations is that a proportion of Métis behavior can be directly linked to their genetic makeup, partially European, which provided a propensity to civilization, and partially Indian. The text shows Giraud struggling to reconcile two different interpretations of the Métis identity. He suggests that the differentiation was determined to a large extent by the manner in which the Métis children were reared, mostly by their mothers,

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[23] Ibid., p. 467, Tome 1.This and the following translations are my own.
[24] Ibid., p. 462, Tome 1.

in this example, and that because the mother usually cared for the young, the children tended to grow up more like 'savage' Indians rather than 'civilized' Europeans.

Here again, Giraud used the missionary sources and missionary characterizations as the foundation for his conclusions without ever questioning the constructive aspect of these sources. What today might be viewed as bigotry was simply contextual and a time specific view of the world. After all, the missionaries, like Giraud, were affected by their racial biases, ideas of culture, and religious teachings. Interestingly, the construction of the Métis subject was never questioned.

These early writings situated the Métis within a greater context, often focusing on popular accounts of events like the Sayer trial, the Riel Resistance of 1869 and Rebellion of 1885, which were characterizations drawn from older missionary texts that described the Métis in a particular fashion. That fashion became the norm as each subsequent interpretation of the Métis simply extended original constructions. Whether the accounts were drawn from missionary records or institutional records like the Hudson's Bay Company accounts, the constructions of Métis identity were consistently enlarged. The portrayal of the Métis between initial missionary accounts and more contemporary constructions are scarcely different.

W.L. Morton agreed with much of Giraud's characterization of the Métis and applied it to the Resistance of 1869 in his work on Manitoba history,[25] though his basic premise of Red River as an island of civilization was in contrast to Giraud's civilization/barbarism dichotomy. Morton's concept of Red River nonetheless saw the Métis as a people situated between civilization and barbarism. As a secluded and insular population, Morton thought that a compromise between civilization and barbarism, between sedentary and nomadic economy and between Christianity and paganism, was achieved in

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[25] W.L.Morton, Manitoba: A History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957).

Red River.[26] Essentially, Morton thought the compromise had been successfully negotiated in this one locality.

But Morton's interpretation differed from both Giraud's and Stanley's in that he believed the roots of the Red River Resistance were not to be found in the clash between civilization and barbarism, but in the assertion of a Métis corporate identity. The Dominion of Canada was willing to grant individual rights to all British subjects, but the Métis sought, according to Morton, corporate rights which could only be satisfied by government legitimization. Naturally, Morton interpreted the government's blunder of forgetting to inform or include the Métis in the transfer as exacerbating their tenuous corporate survival. In Morton's framework the Métis Resistance 1869-70 was the first instance of Western protest against Confederation.

Moreover, the concept of corporate survival is usually associated more with primitive groups rather than more civilized individuated societies. So, although Morton is elevating the Métis response in one sense, in another sense, it is only a lateral motion. But characterizations of the Métis subject again are not being critically analyzed. Morton states:

> No one has used that rich depository to greater effect, and all students of Western Canadian history will be grateful to M. Giraud and to the Company for having made so much new information available.[27]

In a way Morton is correct. Giraud did open the door to a wealth of information about the Métis. But the wealth of information also included many accepted constructions of the Métis, which were used by Morton and many that followed.

The rise of Métis Nationalism and political activism in the 1960s had a significant impact on Métis scholarship. For the purposes of this thesis, however, this constituted a step backward. Spurred by contemporary land claims, scholars like Doug Sprague have taken

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[26] W.L. Morton, "The Canadian Métis," The Beaver, (September 1950), pp. 5.
[27] W.L Morton, "The Canadian Métis," The Beaver, (September 1950), p.3.

the Métis identity or Nationality as a given, a fundamental assumption, and instead have focused on the Canadian government and its role in dispossessing the Métis of their lands. While this focus is undoubtedly important, it marks a turn away from the issues this thesis is concerned with, the social construction of the Métis identity in the 19th century.

It was instead fur trade historians who turned back to the questions of Métis origins and ethnogenesis that Giraud had first raised. Reflecting the trend to social history in the 1960s, historians like John E. Foster, Sylvia Van Kirk, Jennifer Brown and Jacqueline Peterson began investigating the social worlds that the fur trade had created, and crucial to these fur trade societies were the Métis.

Fur trade society was heavily dependent upon the symbiotic relationships between European men and Indian and Métis women. Prior to Sylvia Van Kirk's[28] intensive study of the social and economic roles of women in the fur trade, they were barely investigated and little was known about their role in this staple economy. In Many Tender Ties, Van Kirk confidently asserts that alliances to Indian women . . . "were the central social aspect of the fur trader's progress across the country,"[29] without which no economic activity could flourish. The nature of the fur trade (being the accumulation of fur bearing animals) brought Europeans to the outer reaches of Rupert's land and in order to establish trading links with Indian women functioned as economic and social intermediaries. As a result, families of mixed-bloods grew from generations of fur trade alliances.

The circumstances from which a Métis people matured is not the central question that Van Kirk addresses. She is interested in the necessary role that women had in the fur trade. Though she does not directly argue that the development of a Métis identity occurred under certain conditions, she does state that the Indian and Métis women in the fur trade

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[28] Sylvia Van Kirk, Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870 (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer Publishing Ltd. 1980).
[29] Ibid., p.4.

established, supported, and ultimately decided trade links for their European husbands. Such was the case, according to Van Kirk, until the dwindling of the trade and the arrival of white women when Indian and Métis women were displaced. Her work is essentially a social history of the fur trade.

Following in that vein, Jennifer S.H. Brown's Strangers in Blood[30] also deals with fur trade families, but her focus is more on the male side of the experience. Alternatively, Brown notices a difference between families in the Hudson's Bay Company tradition and those growing from the North West Company tradition. But she takes the social history of families in the fur trade a step farther. Brown introduces family development strategies fur-trade fathers used to provide their offspring with the best possible opportunities at a livelihood. Some opted for overseas education, and yet others tried to get their sons into the Company and their daughters married to Company Officers. Whatever strategy these fathers of mixed-blood children adopted, they nonetheless were active in their children's economic, social and emotional growth. She suggested that many of these families in Red River were patrifocal, and that the fathers' intervention seemed to determine mixed-blood children's success thereafter.

In Brown's conception, this patrifocality prevented the formation of a "Métis" identity. It was those mixed-blood families in which fur-trade fathers did not play a role but were dominated by Native mothers that a Métis identity emerged. It was from these approaches and questions that the preconditions to Métis ethnogenesis were beginning to emerge, if only through the scholarship of fur trade and social history.

It seemed as though all that remained was someone to piece together the parts of Métis ethnogenesis. But the issue of the birth of this new people was not so simple. When

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[30] Jennifer S.H. Brown, Strangers in Blood (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980).

Jacqueline Peterson wrote her article "A Social Portrait of the Great Lakes Métis"[31] which described mixed blood society in the Great Lakes region as unique and apart from any European or Indian communities, she began what was to be the long process of piecing together Métis origins. Though she identified certain characteristic behaviors, commonalities, and cultural differentiations among the mixed-blood population of the Great Lakes before 1815, she did not explore the Red River Métis. She identified them as possible descendants of the Great Lakes tradition, but there remained the need for an in-depth study of the further growth and development of the Métis in Red River and beyond.

Peterson's methodology in her work on the Great Lakes Métis served as a stencil for later investigations. In it she identifies "the hallmarks of the Great Lakes trade" as being first a movement inland after 1649 to replace the loss of Huron middlemen, which marked an increase in intermarriage between traders and Indian women. Next, Peterson outlines the monopolization of middle occupations in the trade by Métis male offspring of traders, who in turn developed trading towns separate from European forts and Indian villages. This was made possible by the Iroquois Peace in 1701. For instance, according to Peterson, "these communities founded between 1702 and 1815 shared two characteristics."[32] They were 'occupationally monolithic' and they were occupied by predominantly by the offspring of Canadian employees and their Indian wives whose children then married within that same social and economic grouping. She asserts, "these communities did not represent an extension of French, and later British colonial culture, but were rather adaptations of the Upper Great Lakes environment."[33] Finally, what developed

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[31] Jacqueline Peterson, "A Social Portrait of the Great Lakes Métis," Ethnohistory 25/1 (Winter 1978), p.41-67. Her next work which follows in the development of this idea is "Ethnogenesis: The settlement and Growth of a "New People" in the Great Lakes Region, 1702-1815," in American Indian Culture and Research Journal 6:2 (1982) p.23-64.

[32] Jacqueline Peterson, "Many Roads to Red River: Métis genesis in the Great Lakes region, 1680-1815," in New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1985), p.41.

[33] Ibid.

was an identity which was regionally and occupationally distinct. Her methodology of finding common characteristics from which emerged a unique and distinctive Métis culture became a model from which other Métis communities could be investigated.

The investigation of the Red River Métis and the necessary preconditions to their development as a separate and unique people was undertaken by John Foster who used many of the same steps of ethnogenesis as Peterson. As with Peterson, Foster describes the necessary conditions under which ethnogenesis occurred. He borrowed the notion of occupational niches as being a necessary condition as well as the development of a separate community in a specific regional setting. Foster's insightful contribution to the literature is the in-depth investigation of the conditions of ethnogenesis: namely wintering, the role of the 'freeman' in the development of Métis identity, and the description of crucial relationships between the 'freeman' and his Native relatives.[34] In so doing, Foster essentially identifies and situates the emergence of a unique Plains Métis.

Since Giraud's Le Métis Canadien, no in depth exploration of the "hivernement" or wintering phenomenon had been attempted until Foster. He identified the wintering experience as an adventure which was undertaken in response to extreme climatic conditions and economic need. So, of all the children born of European fathers and Indian mothers, Foster specifies those particular individuals born of the wintering experience, as most likely to become what we call Plains Métis.

The crucial individual was what Foster termed the 'freeman' or '*gens libres*'. But this individual was not just any individual. He had a penchant for adventure, a strong sense of established trade links, an independent mind and a propensity for survival in an otherwise harsh environment. These 'freemen' challenged the *status quo* of company regulations and

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[34] John Foster, "Wintering, the Outsider Adult Male and Ethnogenesis of the Western Plains Métis," Prairie Forum 19 (Spring 1994), pp.1-13.

allegiances, they ventured into a generally inhospitable environment, and they established blood ties within communities of Indians from which they obviously differed.

Once in the community, they established partners, relatives, and bonds that favored their economic advancement. Foster asserts that "perhaps as critical as this spousal relationship was the relationship between the outsider adult male and his country wife's male relatives." Conditional acceptance from the extended family garnered the 'freeman' the power to first survive, and then to pursue economic activities. The social skills and intimate knowledge of Indian ways required to succeed explain the distinguished nature of this 'freeman'.

Foster's contributions to the scholarship are clear. He mapped out, with specificity, the conditions under which a Plains Métis identity developed. But understanding how an identity developed is quite distinct from investigating ideas, preconceptions and projections of that identity. Once the Métis emerged as an identifiable group which was the contour of which Foster clearly elucidated, there still remained the task of understanding how that identity was understood and constructed by different influences, ideas, and most of all for the purposes of this topic, by significant people.

At the center of the fur trade were the Métis families who hunted, manufactured, and traded fur as entrepreneurs, capitalizing on world and local market demands. In Homeland to Hinterland,[35] Gerhard Ens investigates the evolving Métis response to capitalism and concludes that unlike previously assumed judgments of Métis responses as passive victims to advancing capitalism or unsuccessful adaptors to trade changes, they were in fact highly specialized and successful entrepreneurs. According to Ens, the Red River Métis in fact were integral in the advance of capitalism between 1840 and 1890 and they situated themselves in such a way as to fully capitalize on growing markets. The study, which

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[35] Gerhard Ens, Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Métis in the Nineteenth Century (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

scrutinizes the two parishes of St.Andrews and St. Francois Xavier, cuts across all visible differences of race, religion, and ethnicity and identifies the Red River Métis as a capable and instrumental economic group in the development of a Western economy.

Despite the rich scholarship on both the Métis and the Oblates of Marie Immaculate and their missions in the North West, there has been little investigation of the relationship between the two instrumental groups. Yet we know that their intense relationship due to climatic demands, common language and religion, and later their necessary cohesion during hunting expeditions, predisposed the Oblates and the Métis to mutual identification. What remains to be understood is how the Métis viewed the Oblates, how the Oblates viewed the Métis, and how those views were constructed and transferred to the world at large. In essence, we need to understand how much of our present day views of the Métis in Canada were constructed notions which date back to those initial intimate relationships on the prairie.

The questions of ethnogenesis, the way the Métis developed in terms of how, why, when, and where have all been addressed in the scholarship. The primary relationship has been defined as being between the trader and his Indian partner or between the trader and his economic activity. The scholarship has yet to investigate the relationship between the important pillar of all communities in the Northwest, the Oblates and the wintering plains hunters. The Oblates of Mary Immaculate and the Métis "hivernant" communities are central to answering questions about our understanding of a Plains Métis identity. Inasmuch as John Foster examined the physical conditions for Métis development on the plains, it is the goal of this thesis to examine the ideological parameters of the social construction of the identity of the plains Métis by attempting to elucidate how the Oblates understood the Métis, and how their communication of this construct has affected both subsequent scholarship and our understanding of the Métis.

Chapter 3: The Métis and the Wintering Experience

The identifiable relationship between the Oblate order and the plains Métis was not forged in a mission or a residential school where a utopian Europe was reconstructed. Rather what inextricably forged the Métis/Oblate relationship occurred in the remote wintering villages far away from European civilization, and occurred between individual Oblates and Métis families. The Oblates who accompanied plains wintering parties on their hunts were distinct, even among their peers. In particular, Métis/Oblate relations occurred in a very specific context: the dangerous nature of the hunt; a predatory enemy, the Sioux and Blackfoot; the rigors of the climate; and excessive alcohol consumption. These pressures were uncommon in nature and unique to wintering communities. They created the context for a unique relationship unreplicated anywhere else in Western Canada, and they were crucial to the development of a distinct Métis cultural identity. This association was intense and powerful enough to affect both the Métis and the Oblates.

To examine the Oblate understanding of the Métis, it is first necessary to understand the interaction between the Oblates and the Métis in the wintering communities and how this wintering phenomenon transpired. The interaction between the Oblates and the Métis of Western Canada occurred first in the Red River Settlement. The Red River settlement attracted a variety of Métis from various parts of the North West including the country-born from the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) posts and the French-speaking Métis of the Great Lakes tradition.[1] The country-born were normally the children of English Europeans, usually the sons and daughters of Hudson's Bay Company officers or the children of Scottish Orkneymen. These children were often descendants of unions between officers of a post and an Indian woman that supplied the post with her family's trade goods. Though

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[1] Gerhard Ens, Homeland to Hinterland: The changing Worlds of the Métis in the Nineteenth Century. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), p.14.

such unions were not encouraged between lower company employees and Indian women, officers were allowed to keep a 'bedfellow'.

Several events and processes occurred to bring the various groups of Métis and Country-born to the Red River settlement which had begun as a HBC colony and a settlement scheme of Lord Selkirk. Competition between the Northwest Company, with which most of the Métis were associated, and the HBC exacerbated relations between the colony members and the local Métis. The colony became the site of the battle of Seven Oaks, which nearly destroyed it in 1816. These problems ended when the HBC and the Northwest Company merged in 1821, and shortly thereafter the Red River Settlement became home for the Métis and the country-born. The rationalization of the fur-trade brought about by the merger resulted in the closing of hundreds of posts. Superfluous servants were released from Company service and many of the HBC men and their families moved to the Red River Settlement. As well, freemen hunting bands which had previously provisioned and traded for the various posts also drifted into the settlement as opportunities declined in the fur-trade.[2] The Red River Settlement offered them the ability to settle near family and friends, educate their children, participate in small scale horticulture, continue buffalo hunting, and work as laborers for the HBC. This influx of Métis into the Red River Settlement solidified the colony as a permanent community. From the perspective of the incoming officers, their families, and the Métis hunters, traders, and tripmen,[3] what was to be the Red River settlement offered a bountiful hunting ground in the very center of Rupert's Land and their migration to Red River was sensible. Rather than return to Britain, retired employees of the fur trading companies chose to settle in Red River with their Indian wives and children where they could raise their mixed-blood children with the expectation of an education without returning to Europe.

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[2] Ibid., p.10.

[3] Tripmen were those men, usually Métis, hired by the HBC to transport goods to Company posts via lakes and rivers.

Of all the mixed-blood people who settled in Red River, there were noticeable differences in their respective economic pursuits. For instance, men coming from the Northwest company tradition were more likely to be tripmen, traders and hunters. Most of these Métis, grown children of traders and Indian mothers, were French speaking and were raised in the tradition of the hunt. Many others, neither traders nor hunters, were farmers or tripmen. The tripmen lifestyle was quite different than the hunting/trading tradition and their seasonal pursuits varied so much that hunters and traders were often already gone by the time the tripmen returned to the settlement. Farmers were a cross-section of both country-born and Métis. But what clearly differentiated the plains Métis from the HBC country-born was a talent for the hunt that surpassed that of all other groups. So though many of the Red River inhabitants were of a mixed-blood origin, their economic pursuits and their cultural experiences varied.[4]

The Plains Métis who settled in Red River maintained a semi-nomadic lifestyle centered around two annual hunts, tripping, fishing and seasonal agricultural activities. The plains Métis established river lots which ran perpendicular to the Red River. Each plot alongside the other provided access to the River, as well as a plot of land receding away from the river whereby a family could establish a home and grow a garden for vegetables and even grain for any animals they might keep.[5]

The economy remained relatively varied until the 1840s, and the buffalo hunting Métis of Red River could acquire most of the meat and buffalo robes required from their bi-annual buffalo hunts. By the 1840s however, some of the plains Métis started spending more time on the plains, wintering where they could find buffalo close by. This was the preferred mode of life among the more nomadic, hunting Métis and their families. Naturally, not all Métis families chose the rigorous life of the winter hunt, and even winterers retained

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[4] John Foster, "The Plains Métis" in Native Peoples: The Canadian Experience. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986).

their plots of land in Red River, cultivating a variety of crops when they returned in the spring. But many also chose not to return for several years at a time.

The impetus for change to more permanent wintering occurred in the 1840s. First, crop failures between 1844-1848 required more hunting to compensate for dismal agricultural production and an innovation developed in the form of the buffalo hunt and pemmican production. Next, Métis/Native hunting bands were encouraged in their pursuits for the buffalo during winter months because of the expanding markets for buffalo robes with their full winter fur. The Hudson's Bay monopoly of the trade was unenforceable once U.S markets became accessible; the traders and hunters could not be easily stopped from acquiring the goods and trading them south.[6] The onset of the Civil War also increased demand for the buffalo robe. In response to new markets for robes, agricultural endeavors which, even if successful, had no external markets, and a natural ability and skill in relation to the hunt, the Métis turned to these opportunities necessitating increased hunting and wintering. In this process they became preeminent middlemen in what has been termed the basis of the first Great Industry in Western Canada.[7] As successful middlemen and hunters, the Métis increased the frequency and duration of their hunting and wintering excursions, wintering on the plains several years at a time. This in turn, affected their relationship to the Oblate missionaries.

Wintering or "hivernements" as it is commonly referred to in various texts was the establishment of temporary hunting communities on the prairie in winter. This significant change in the hunt was a result of the receding buffalo herds and a growing demand for buffalo robes which combined to provide a sustainable life for wintering families. The receding buffalo forced the Métis to migrate further and further away from the Red River

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[5] Gerhard Ens, Homeland to Hinterland, p. 34.
[6] Gerhard Ens, Homeland to Hinterland, p.74-76.
[7] Irene Spry, as found in Gerhard Ens, Homeland to Hinterland, p.73.

settlement to winter near the available buffalo herds. As opposed to the regular summer hunts in which most Métis partook, the wintering groups were a specialized group and only a certain genre of Métis would winter for the hunt. As Marcel Giraud noted,"Certes, le nomadisme d'hiver ne constituait pas une pratique aussi générale que les chasses annuelles. La population métisse n'y participait point dans sa totalité."[8](Certainly, winter nomadism did not constitute a general practice as did the annual hunt. The Métis population did not participate totally).

The Métis who engaged in the wintering hunts would locate their villages in locales that had wood for the erection of their buildings and the necessary material for heating in areas considered natural oases for the buffalo. Areas such as the Souris River, Turtle Mountain, Cypress Hills, Wood Mountain, Buffalo Lake, and various points along the tributaries of the Missouri River were favored wintering sites.[9] Certainly as buffalo receded in a South-westerly direction, winterers followed the herds and this required a more permanent wintering existence. The "hivernants" would return to such locales until the buffalo were no longer present, at which point they would move on. The buffalo were naturally attracted to the aforementioned areas for several reasons. As with the winterers, an abundance of wooded terrain provided not only shelter from the harsh winter of the plains, but within the wooded refuge grasses might be found which could be foraged. Furthermore, all of areas to which the herds migrated were and are still considered areas of natural abundance which included water and grass for both the buffalo and the Métis horses.

As wintering groups moved ever further westward and southward, the Métis encroached on hostile Indian territory. This dynamic brought with it increasing Sioux and Blackfoot hostilities. The size of the parties grew as the needs of the Métis increased and

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[8] Marcel Giraud, Les Métis Canadien (Manitoba: Les Editions du Blé, 1945), p.817.
[9] Ibid., p.820.

the Sioux grew more hostile. In order to protect themselves from the Sioux attacks, any Métis hunting groups had to have critical mass.

> En 1851, 700 hommes figurent dans la caravanes de la Prairie du Cheval Blanc et de la Rivière Rouge, ce qui implique des éffectifs globaux bien supérieurs à 1000 personnes; en 1852 l'expédition compte un millier d'hommes, tous cavaliers aguèrris et capables de tenir tête aux agressions des Sioux.[10]

> In 1851, 700 men were included in the caravans of the White Horse Prairie and Red River, which included a more global number of about 1000 people; in 1852 the expedition counted a thousand, all calvary and armed, ready to hold their own against the aggressions of the Sioux.

The purpose of the wintering group was to hunt and prepare buffalo robes, though the men of the group would sometimes trap other fur-bearing animals for trade.[11] Obviously the meat of the animal provided food which was prepared into pemmican, but hunting for trade was the prime motive. The winterers would often hunt between November and February which was when the animals' coat was in full growth and most marketable. Sometimes they would return in the spring to Red River. As the market for buffalo robes increased, families would occasionally not return at all, remaining in the prairie for up to a few years trading their robes along the Missouri.

Wintering required the erection of temporary dwellings for the hunting period. From the accounts of both traders and missionaries we have information about the wintering sites. These villages and buildings were generally very similar though there were variations in materials used to construct the buildings, depending on the region and its available resources. What was certain is that all sites were established near a wooded area providing access to building materials and wood for winter heat. The standard Métis wintering house was a small enclosure, usually only about fifteen by fifteen feet, constructed of logs with the spaces filled with clay to stop the flow of winter air.[12] The larger holes like windows and

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[10] Ibid., p. 802.
[11] Ibid., p. 820.
[12] Milton and Cheadle The North-West Passage by Land, (London:Cassell, Petter, and Galpin,1865) p.75-77

doors were covered over by tightly pulled and framed parchment and buffalo hide. The roof was the same parchment with poles interspersed and covered over with earth and grass. One account noted that the roofs of these dwellings often sprouted foliage in the summer, "the growing season (has) transformed into a picturesque garden of wormwood and willowherbs, in the midst of which a fine willow has the boldness to simulate a steeple."[13] The floor was dug out, perhaps two feet, which made it warmer and because the roof was only about six feet high, the lowered floor made for more room inside. It would seem that the demands of arriving at a site, assessing it for its practicality and then building the dwellings had to be accomplished fairly quickly before the snow fell. In one account of the construction of a wintering dwelling, a major difficulty came with building the chimney. Milton and Cheadle's account explains the seemingly simple construction, yet it evokes a sense of the difficulty of the task at hand:

> But we still had the most important and difficult work of all-to build the chimney. For a long time we were unable to discover any clay wherewith to cement the boulders of which a chimney is constructed in backwood fashion, and began to be seriously afraid that the strong frost would commence before our fireplace was ready.... At last, after digging through several feet of rich loom we discovered some clayey soil, with which we made shift and the fireplace rose rapidly. As it approached completion, a fire was lighted, and we were congratulating ourselves upon complete success,-when crash! and down it tumbled! Great was our consternation, and for some time we were completely nonplussed. There was however no time to be lost in repairing the damage, or we should be left without a fireplace when the thermometer was down below zero.[14]

Given the resources available and the speed at which they had to be built, the Métis hunters constructed these buildings with great skill, determination, and innovation.

Many wintering groups departed from Pembina in September. The group often consisted of a mix of well-to-do Métis as well as less fortunate families. As Giraud states:

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[13] Dana Mac Granger, Brian D. Ross "Petite Ville Site, Survey Saskatchewan, Parks Canada Research Bulletin, No.143, (Sept 1980), p.2. Description by Father Petitot.
[14] Milton and Cheadle p. 75-77.

> Dans ces hivernements, on ne trouvait pas seulement les métis les plus humbles et les pauvres, ceux qui refusaient obstinément de faire la moindre concession à la vie sédentaire. Les réprésentants de la bourgeiosie métisse, ceux qui se distinguaient pas l'activité de leurs entreprises ou qui participaient à la vie politique de la colonie y figuraient aussi bien, obéissant à l'attrait de la chasse au bison plus qu'à de réelles nécéssités.[15]
>
> In these wintering communities were not only the humblest and poorest of Métis, those obstinately refusing even the slightest concession toward sedentary life. But also representatives of the Métis bourgeoisie, those distinguished by the activity of the hunt or those participating in the political life of the colony, were also included, drawn by the attraction of the hunt rather than by necessity.

What shaped the experience between the Métis wintering bands and the Oblate missionary were the constant demands for survival that were being placed on both groups. The harsh climate and the necessity of erecting shelters was but the first of a series of challenges. Even the trip out to the site could be riddled with prairie blizzards known to kill unsuspecting travelers. The Métis also had a long standing hostility with the Sioux over territory and hunting rights. In addition, there was the threat of famine within the camp if buffalo could not be found. If and when the buffalo could be procured, the dangers of the hunt itself were life threatening and any small error could kill a hunter or render him permanently disabled. Finally, the internal threat which alcohol held for the peace of the group was no insignificant factor, especially for the missionary who knew first hand of its destructive capabilities among the Métis wintering bands. All these factors combined to forge a closeness between the Métis and the Oblates in these "mission ambulante" and were instrumental to the Oblate view of the plains Métis.

The climate posed a serious and incessant threat to the lives of all wintering group members. As wintering would imply, the bands lived in their roughly built houses for the winter. But in the event that the buffalo were scant, the band would have to travel to find new

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[15] Letter from Père Alexis André to Bishop, Lac Sainte-Anne, 3 Janvier 1867, as found in Marcel Giraud's Le Métis Canadien, p.820.

prey. Though the following example is taken from an account of Hudson's Bay servants, the description of the harsh prairie winter climate is what is important.

> Scraping the snow [while caught in the blizzard] away down to the grass with our snowshoes, we laid down with robes and blankets under and over us, and let the snowdrift cover us up. After spending forty-eight hours huddled together for warmth in this decidedly uncomfortable "camp," nibbling a morsel of pemmican and trying to thaw snow for drinking in the covered copper tea kettle we put to warm in our bosoms.[16]

Once the buildings were erected, preparation for the hunt began. The basic organization of the hunting party consisted of captains, who alternated each hunt, and individual men under the captain, usually in groups of ten. The captain was the leader and he was elected and chosen based on his strength and experience as a hunter, and his fairness in assessing and resolving potential conflicts. The 'Chef', the leading free-trader and similar to a regional band leader among the Indians[17] was the figurehead, the leader, elected by all of the hunters of the wintering village.[18] Much of his ability to lead depended on his reputation, constantly scrutinized and open to change. The 'Chef' was the unquestionable arbiter of disputes, "...his authority was second to none, save the priest..."[19] Once the Chef was elected as the leader of the hunting party, the other groups were selected: the councilmen, captains, soldiers, and scouts. The Chef and the councilmen made the decisions and had the orders executed via the captains. The soldiers hunted the buffalo and were called on to defend should there be an external threat to the camp. Regulations about the hunt procedures were strictly adhered to and anyone breaking the rules could have his equipment seized, he could be disallowed a hunting expedition, or in some cases he would be publicly humiliated. The rules were simply that once the buffalo had been spotted,

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[16] Isaac Cowie, Company of Adventurers: A narrative of Seven Years in the Service of the Hudson's Bay Company during 1867-1874, (University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1913), p.353.
[17] John Foster, "Le Missionaire and Le Chef Métis", Western Oblate Studies I, (May 1989), p. 121.
[18] R.P. Fourmond, Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats Marie Immaculée, No 39 and 40-Vol 10 (Septembre-Decembre 1882), p.143.

advancing or firing upon the animals only began at the signal of the captain, giving each hunter a fair chance. Furthermore, each animal was marked by some item indicating who the animal belonged to, discouraging any potential disputes.[20]

Despite their organizational discipline, the Métis were still susceptible to the dangerous nature of the buffalo hunt. Most of the chronicles were compiled by missionaries within the "hivernants" communities. The potential dangers of the hunt left the missionaries in awe of the courage required to hunt:

> Le boeuf des prairies, qui, provoqué, fait voler en l'air son adversaire comme une balle élastique, le broie sous ses pieds et lui laboure les flancs de ses éffroyables cornes, n'a pas même l'idée de se mesurer avec l'homme, si ce dernier ne lui cherche pas querelle.
>
> The prairie buffalo if provoked, throws his adversary into the air like an elastic ball, crushes him beneath his feet and plows his sides with his horrifying horns, with no intent to quarrel with man, if left to his alone.[21]

The hunters were always on horseback, so an inherent danger was for either the horse to fall or be gouged by an enraged buffalo. Either scenario meant that the rider was open to the attack of the buffalo.

> Quelquefois, réduit au désèspoir et serré de trop près, l'animal furieux se retourne, fait front au chasseur, se rue sur lui, le renverse et lui laboure le flancs avant qu'il ait le temps de parer le coup. Il y a dans la prairie, des trous nombreux dissimulés dans les hautes herbes; si le cheval au galop se heurte à cet obstacle, il roule avec son cavalier, et bien souvent ce dernier ne se relève qu'éstropie: quelquefois une balle mal dirigée, dans le tourbillon qui passe si rapidement, va frapper un chasseur au lieu d'atteindre le boeuf sauvage; il y a ainsi des accidents de tout genre.
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> Occasionally, reduced to despair and pushed into a corner, the furious animal turns, faces the hunter, and stampedes him, knocking him down and plows his sides before he even knows what is about to hit him. There are a number of holes spread out among the tall grasses; if a galloping horse clashes with this obstacle, he roles with his rider, and often the horse only stands maimed; occasionally a misdirected bullet, in this fast moving whirlwind, will hit a hunter rather than the wild buffalo; there are therefore accidents of all kinds.[22]

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[19] Vernice Aldrich, "Father George Antoine Belcourt, Red River Missionary," North Dakota Historical Quarterly (October1927), p. 44

[20] Marcel Giraud, Le Métis Canadien, p.806.

[21] R.P.Decorby, "Les Hivernants," Missions de la Congrégations de Marie Immaculée, volume 18 (1880), p. 194-195.

The dangerous nature of the hunt affected the wintering experience and the way the Métis functioned as a group. Though the reality of life on the plains during this period could be described as harsh and difficult, hunting and wintering on the plains was even more dangerous than sedentary life on the plains. The importance of group solidarity rather than individual success is highlighted in the context of the danger of hunting. Despite the necessity of assistance in an agriculturist environment, the hunting bands and winterers were in the same harsh situation and much more dependent upon each other for the success of the hunt and the success of the entire company. Furthermore, though individual families might retire to their private lodges, the living situation was much more communal and inter-dependent. Food was shared as was the labor required to prepare the robes for sale.

As the Métis encroached on Sioux territory for the buffalo hunt, the Sioux became more possessive of dwindling supplies of buffalo resources. The wintering experience exposed the Métis to endemic warfare and the "hivernants" battled with the Sioux from 1844-1855.[23] This warfare affected the Métis in two significant ways. First, in addition to the challenges of the climate and the hunt, the threat of war made the Métis more tightly knit since a lack of vigilance could endanger the survival of the entire camp which included women and children. Second, endemic warfare further validated an already pervasive bond between all members of any "hivernant" community; the only chance for survival was to band together in a group. The external threat which Sioux attacks forced on the Métis improved their solidarity.

As the buffalo continued to retreat in the 1850s and 1860s, the winterers were forced to migrate further and further into Indian territory. The competition for buffalo intensified an already bloody war between the Plains Métis buffalo hunters and their Indian brothers: the Sioux and the Blackfoot. The Métis exhibited an offensive-defensive stance by at once

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[22] Ibid., p.198.

aggressively defending their right to be there and violating Sioux and Blackfoot territories.[24] Though the Indian enemy almost always behaved the same with ceremonial dress prior to attack; a parley; a sneak attack and then an attempted hostage-taking, the Métis nonetheless could not afford to treat the enemy as anything other than a formidable opponent. Victory for the "hivernants" depended on knowing the topography, the route to take so as to not leave the camp open to attack, and actual battle maneuvers.

The Métis developed battle maneuvers that disabled Sioux and Blackfoot attacks. Once the "hivernants" had established that they had been spotted in Indian territory and that an attack was immanent, they would circle the famous Red River carts, dig trenches, place the horses, the children and the women in the center, and then strategically arrange themselves in various places around the circle. As the enemy approached, they were picked off by hidden snipers. A small number of Métis could essentially ward off a greater number of Sioux or Blackfoot by forcing the enemy nearer to the camp. The Métis were experienced and excellent shots, and armed mounted soldiers also sniped at oncoming attackers.

Given the opportunity, the Sioux and the Blackfoot also stole the horses of the wintering communities. The horse had many functions within the hunting community and the loss of too many resulted in potential famine and loss of mobility. The horse was the main transport system among the wintering families. The Red River carts were drawn by the horses on the trek out to the various hunting areas. Once established for the winter, travel to the buffalo's feeding areas was on horseback. Finally, the hunt itself was on horseback. Essentially, if their horses were stolen, the wintering community could find itself stranded, with no spoils of the hunt and no way to return with their goods to Red River. Given their importance, horse theft was a natural part of Sioux, Blackfoot, and Métis warfare.

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[23] Marcel Giraud, Le Métis Canadien, p.826.
[24] Ibid.

> . . . les Pieds-noirs ont volé 43 chevaux aux gens-libres, dans la prairie, et il y a aucune èspèrance où les recouvrir. Nous voilà dans une guerre avec eux et je crois qu'il y aura beaucoup de trouble, dans la prairie, l'été prochaine. Que faire avec nos chrétiens, dont les chevaux ont été volés, qui trouvant une cheval Pieds-noirs, l'emparent, pour le payer?[25]
>
> . . .the Blackfoot stole 43 horses from the freeman, on the prairie, and there is no hope of recovering them. Here we are in a war with them and I believe there will be a lot of trouble, on the prairie, next summer. What are we to do with our Christians whose horses were stolen, who upon finding a Blackfoot horse take it as repayment?

Aside from the external threats to safety and the climate, there was one other peril that threatened the solidarity of the wintering communities. Alcohol consumption jeopardized the continuity of hunting groups so much so that its absence was significant. Father Alexis André noted in 1862 that . . . "le bienfait de cette tranquillité nous le devons a l'absense de la boissons dans le camp."[26] Alcohol was usually offered in trade for payment of buffalo robes and could be acquired throughout the season. Most missionary records state that overall, social cohesion was threatened by frequent parties and subsequent brawls when alcohol was available in the wintering camp. For example, Lestanc noted in 1863 that the winterers were truly admirable in the absence of alcohol.[27] Missionaries regarded this threat so compelling that some missionaries tried to divert alcohol before it even arrived among the winterers. For instance, Father Lestanc pleaded with his superior to warn George Fisher against further distribution of alcohol; "Could you please give George Fisher a strong warning so that he is no longer tempted to furnish alcohol to the winterers?"[28] The missionaries stayed abreast of the traders who trafficked alcohol.

> Comme on pouvait le prévoir, il y a des tonnes d'alcool et de rhum à la Montage de Bois. Des smugglers de Pembina eu ont apporté une quantité de gallons et je ne serai pas surprise qu'il eu arrivé même de

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[25] Letter from Lacombe to Bishop Taché, April 13, 1861. Archives of The Historical Society of St. Boniface, Fonds Taché T0403.

[26] Letter from André to Bishop Taché, 12 July 1862. Archives of The Historical Society of St. Boniface by the Missouri, Fonds Taché, T1482.

[27] Letter from Lestanc to Bishop Taché, May 17 1863. Archives of The Historical Society of St. Boniface, T2162.

[28] Letter from Lestanc to Bishop Taché, 3 May 1872. Archives of The Historical Society of St. Boniface, Montagnes des Bois, Fonds Taché, T10300

> Manitoba. Les smugglers de Pembina sont Maxime Marion, Roger Smoth et un (Brown) Canada. Quant aux commerçants de Manitoba, c'est George Fisher qui continue de nous gratifier tous les ans, en dépit de la loi, de la liqueur de feu.
>
> Like we could have predicted, there are tons of alcohol and rum at Wood Mountain. The smugglers from Pembina brought gallons and I would not be surprised if they even got it from Manitoba. The smugglers from Pembina are Maxime Marion, Roger Smoth and Brown from Canada. As for the traders from Manitoba, it is George Fisher who continues to grace us, each year, despite the law, with the fire water.[29]

Clearly, the consequences of social disintegration among the wintering bands was significant enough to warrant legislating and forbidding alcohol consumption. Perhaps one could suggest that the resistance among the missionaries was of a religious nature rather than an issue of cohesion and social stability. But given that the preconception that alcohol was a danger followed by serious social consequences meant that the missionaries exhibited zero tolerance for excessive consumption. The group's survival was at risk from external forces that dominated. The climate was not manageable; the hunt was necessary and inherently dangerous; and the Sioux and Blackfoot were unyielding in their territorial domination. The introduction of yet another hazard in the form of alcohol, which created internal dissension, was an unnecessary risk that threatened cohesion and had to be limited.

Social cohesion was arguably the single most important aspect of the hunt. Given the challenges of the climate, the hunt, and endemic warfare, the parties' ability to survive all of the realities of the winter hunt depended upon group solidarity. The hunt also functioned as a community activity both in the killing and processing of meat and robes. Furthermore, without the requisite number of people, the hunters would not have been able to protect themselves from Sioux attacks. If a hunting band, for example, were to disintegrate into the individual families of which it was composed, none of the families would survive the trek

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[29] Letter from Lestanc to Bishop Taché, 14 November 1873. Archives of The Historical Society of St. Boniface, Rivière Blanche, Fonds Taché, T13328.

back to Red River. Social cohesion and the management of the conflicts which could arise in a large group was necessary for survival.

Yet the Métis "hivernants" lacked Indian modes of social cohesion. Unlike their Indian brethren, the Métis were not held in check by kinship links. Among the Indians, the demands, regulations and expectations of a kinship group were clear and they maintained order. The Métis had not yet developed these long-standing kinship ties as they were predominantly a second-generation people. Extensive kinship ties were developed only on the maternal side.[30] Without these links, the Métis established rules of conduct that were parallel to the functioning of kinship group. For instance, the election of a 'chef', a prominent and respectable leader among the winterers, determined how disputes would be resolved. This man was the unquestionable leader of the caravan. During the migration to the hunting grounds, scouts functioned to protect the group from attack and they answered directly to the chef. The leader chose the areas to establish camp and he further managed the hunt. Penalties for disobedience could be severe and ranged from the loss of hunting privileges to group consequences and they were established by design to deter any infractions and maintain the order and peace among all winterers.

The 'Chef' of the "hivernants" community was parallel to the Indian chief and he functioned at a regional level.[31] When larger groups gathered, the regional chief, powerful and respected by all band chiefs, could maintain order as the designated leader. Similarly, because the Métis chef was leading a group of Métis, often from different familial and parish groups from the Red River settlement, he maintained order by earning his status as the established leader. In this sense, the Métis re-fashioned kinship ties available among the Indians by creating parallel innovations with the Chef Métis and his leadership. But in this parallelism, the Métis were always aware of their desire to remain a socio-political unit quite distinct from their Indian brethren. So though they may have mimicked the ways of the

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[30] John E. Foster, "Le Missionaire and le Chef Métis", p.121.

Indians in order to survive the demands of the harsh plains life, they were not willing to assemble among the Indians. They were Métis and they were different.

A distinguishing factor of the Métis "hivernants" was the replacement of Indian kinship rules with the social cohesion of Catholicism. From the outset, Catholic missionaries established a special relationship with the Métis as fellow French speakers in a sea of English and Indian languages. This Catholicism and the presence of a priest among the winterers helped maintain cohesion of the group and mediate social conflict. It was evident that early Catholic contact, though only through early voyageurs, had had an effect on the Métis. Father Albert Lacombe, tells the story in his "Mémoires" of what he believed to be evidence that Catholicism had been significant:

> Un jour dans un de mes voyages, j'ai rencontré sur les bords d'un lac une famille métisse vivant entièrement comme des sauvages mais bien disposés a se faire chrétiens. Je demande au père s'il sait quelque chose du bon Dieu. "je sais un peu le prier," dit-il. Et alors il me récite l'oraison dominicale et la salutation angélique en latin que lui avait appris son vieux père qui vivait alors au milieu des sauvages. Malgré l'oubli des devoirs religieux, par l'éloignement de nos anciens voyageurs, qui après s'être éloignés du foyer domestique se trouvaient dans un pays sans loi, sans la crainte de Dieu et sans le respect de la moralité, il est consolant de savoir qu'ils n'avaient pas perdu la foi.[32]
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> One day during one of my trips, I encountered on the edge of a lake, a Métis family living entirely like savages, but inclined to be Christian. I asked the father if he knew of the good Lord.. " I know how to pray to Him," he said. So he proceeds to recite The Lord's Prayer and the Angelic Salutation in Latin that he had learned from his father who had also lived among the savages. Despite the loss of religious duty, by the ancient voyageurs, who after they had left their domestic lives, found themselves in a country with no laws, nor fear of God and respect for morality, it was consoling to know that they had not lost their faith.

The Métis' interest in Christianity in the context of the "hivernants" community was also pragmatic. The codes of conduct and rules with which to live by enhanced the solidarity and the cohesion of the wintering community in the absence of strong kinship

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[31] Ibid., p.122.
[32] Père Albert Lacombe, "Mémoires" p. 19-20.

ties. The chef Métis, a leader in his own right, was not unaware of the social value of a religious leader among the winterers and fairly early on in the development of wintering communities, missionaries were cared for in exchange for their services. The chef would build their buildings, support their activities, and nurture their mutual underlying expectations for social cohesion and overall success in their journey. Together, the chef Métis and the missionary maintained the necessary regulations for conduct required to move a large group of different people, not necessarily associated by birth, across the prairie to establish a permanent wintering community.

The Red River Settlement offered an attractive option to many Métis. What had once been considered a thorn in the Northwest from the Métis perspective, became an alternative which provided land, access to employment through tripping, hunting, farming and wage labor. But not all of the Métis who settled in Red River were the same. Though most of the Métis engaged in the biannual hunts for buffalo only a minority partook in the winter hunts. What made these Métis different from the rest of the Métis at Red River would further alter their identity, because the challenges of life on the prairie and the presence of an Oblate father, also special among his peers, was to change the course of Oblate/Métis history. Neither group could predict the significance of their experiences on the plains in the overall scheme of history; nor could either group predict the importance that one would have on the other.

Social cohesion was the single primary survival skill the Métis had to master after all other dangers. The group could not disband for fear of enemy attacks, and the size of the party was designed to defend against, and repel, attackers.The institution of the Chef and the missionary was a powerful cohesive force which functioned to ensure the hunting parties' success. With the combination of the spiritual and regulatory components of the Oblate and the power brought by the elected and unquestionable leadership of the Chef, the wintering parties possessed social cohesion capable of withstanding the barrage of challenges brought

forward by wintering on the plains among hostile enemies. Their collective experience made for successful hunts and the dynamic created in these wintering bands created a situation that was to alter the face of Métis identity. It was in these intense and closed quarters that the Oblate missionaries, invited along for their stabilizing and nurturing effects, would assemble a first-hand perspective of the plains Métis. This powerful view of the Métis, constructed by their itinerant Oblates, would help shape Métis identity. Through their writings, the Oblates would also be crucial in shaping outsider views of the Métis.

Chapter 4: La Mission Ambulante

In order to understand the relationship between the Oblate missionaries and the Métis hunters in the wintering communities it is necessary to examine the world views of the Oblates involved in these communities, the time frame of their education in France, and the nature of their philosophies. These preconceptions of the world were brought with them to Red River and then to the wintering communities that they serviced. Furthermore, each Oblate under investigation evinces a unique and different personality which affected the way he interacted with the wintering community and with the Oblate community within which he belonged. The Oblate missionaries in the wintering communities became ambassadors of the Métis as their writings were disseminated to the rest of the literate world and those writings reflected the Oblate, the Métis and their relationship. For these reasons a sketch of both the "mission ambulante" and some of the personality traits of those missionaries involved in this mission is necessary.

The "mission ambulante" arose in relation to the transhumance of the Red River Métis in the early decades of the 19th century, and to understand its development it is necessary to understand the role of the Catholic mission in Red River. The re-establishment of Selkirk's colony in 1817 lacked a religious component. Though the diocese of Montreal attempted to service the Red River area with missionaries, the growing population required a more aggressive and cohesive effort of the Catholic church. The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), the colony's cohesion needed religion, another European pillar of civilization. Mgr. Joseph-Octave Plessis, of Québec, who had been asked by Lord Selkirk to provide missionaries for the French settlement at Red River, began searching through his diocese for potential candidates. Since the conquest of New France however, Catholicism had been tightly monitored and Catholic missions were viewed with suspicion by the British government. The creation of a new diocese in Red River to cater to the needs of a growing

colony, predominantly French and Catholic, was only possible due to Mgr. Plessis' efforts to assure Lower Canada of the Catholic Church's commitment to the throne.[1] Having successfully secured the trust of Lower Canada about the goal of Catholicism in the Northwest and having alleviated all apprehensions, Mgr. Plessis subdivided the region and created two new dioceses.[2]

The language and culture of the Plains Métis made Catholicism the most likely choice for a religion "as at least nine tenths of the Catholics contained had French as their mother tongue."[3] In 1815 a Catholic priest from Québec was sent to 'minister' the Red River area, but at the news of a massacre at Rainy Lake, the priest decided otherwise. By the end of 1818 a Catholic missionary had at last arrived at the colony. Joseph-Norbert Provencher was now in charge of the diocese and Sévère-Joseph-Nicolas Dumoulin and Guillaume-Étienne Edge were his associates. In 1821 the merger between the Hudson's Bay Company and the Northwest Company finally established peace in the colony.

Reverend Edge and Dumoulin set up a school in Pembina for the Métis as it had a great many residents in need of the clergy. Aside from teaching, the priests had many parish activities to tend to. Before any group activities could take place, an appropriate site with a building for protection and worthy of worship had to be established as well as residences for the newcomers. Next, the priests had to minister. Baptisms, marriages, regular communion and catechism were all the responsibility of the few priests. Furthermore, they had the upkeep of their very own household, meals, wood for winter, gardens and parish responsibilities.

Dumoulin and Edge recruited a young Canadian civilian, Legacé as a teacher to follow the buffalo hunters onto the plains on their hunting expeditions. It was not long

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[1] La Société Historique de Saint-Boniface, Histoire de St. Boniface Tome I, (Saint Boniface: Les Éditions du Blés, 1991),p.48.
[2] Ibid., p.70.

before Legacé had an even more students than Edge who usually stayed in the colony of Pembina. Even at this early date, and with limited resources, the priests saw the sense in following the hunting parties to teach among them. The nomadic lifestyle limited access to the hunters and their families if the priests stayed behind awaiting their return from the plains.

Another example of a priest realizing the usefulness of taking part in the hunt was that of Antoine Belcourt and in his writings we see the corollary reaction of the buffalo hunters relieved by the presence of the priest in the 1850s:

> The return from last summer's hunt had been pitiable. After a very long march during excessively hot weather, all had come back with quarter loads, bringing with them only poor provisions. The misfortune was due rather to their lack of co-operation than to the scarcity of animals, consequently, numbers were discouraged. The latter, however, regained confidence when they learned that a priest was to accompany them.[4]

So the notion that more work could be accomplished by the priest while out on the prairie with the hunters emerged. In addition, the hunters began to see the presence of the priest as a socially cohesive element. From Belcourt's account we can see that the Catholic missionaries saw the utility of accompanying the hunters, but there were not enough priests in the colony to undertake both parish duties and accompany the Plains Métis on their summer hunts.

The most important Catholic missionaries to the West quickly became the Oblats de Marie Immaculées. The Oblates were recruited at the request of Bishop Bourget of Montreal as he was unable to provide enough priests from Canada. By the1840s, the dominant missionaries in the Canadian West were the Oblates from France. Founded by Eugène de Mazenod this order had as its ultimate goal the glory of God and the salvation of

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[3] A.G. Morice, History of the Catholic Chuch in Western Canada: From Lake Superior to the Pacific (1659-1895) Volume 1, (The Musson Book Company: Toronto,1910), p. 88.

[4] Letter of Belcourt as found in Vernice Aldrich, "Father George Antoine Belcourt, Red River Missionary" North Dakota Historical Quarterly, Vol II, No.1, (October 1927),p.39.

souls.[5] The newly formed association was established in Marseilles, France, in response to the conflict between liberal- and secular-minded Catholicism. Both the founder and the order he founded reflected a backlash against prevailing intellectual trends. The foundations' regulations were derived from the Sulpician Order, which "tended to put the priest on a pedestal, underlining his dignity as well as his responsibilities" and required each recruit to swear a vow of obedience to the Pope.[6] Consequently, the papacy was the unquestionable authority and the power of the individual priest came directly from the Pope. This ultramontane mindset was also characterized by a profound distrust of the modern, liberal, secular societies that were the products of the French Revolution. De Mazenod, reflecting current trends, designed the curriculum to mirror the church as it was in Europe at the time, and taught the new recruits the art of transplanting that genre of Catholicism to the new world. Furthermore, the Oblate curriculum, influenced by Alphonsus Liguori the moral theologist, was more open to concepts of human weakness, kindness, and mercy.[7]

In addition, in keeping with the foundational aspects of the order, the five Oblates central to this study were indeed following the philosophies of the founder making the poor a focus of their efforts. De Mazenod wrote that Jesus "Il < fils de Dieu> a particulièrement été envoyé pour evangeliser les pauvres...et nous sommes établis précisement pour evangeliser les pauvres."[8] (He <the son of God> was particularly sent to evangelize the poor). Furthermore, De Mazenod believed that flexibility and adaptability was necessary and useful in the pursuit of the primary initiatives of salvation among the poor.[9] Therefore, the ambulant mission, despite seemingly contradictory tendencies (sedentarism and nomadism) was a flexible adaptation of the Oblate missionary's goals of salvation of the poor by accommodating to nomadism.

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[5] L.N Boutin. O.M.I. La Spiritualité de Mgr. de Mazenod (Montreal, Rayonnemat 1970), p. 24.
[6] Ibid, p.15.

[8] Ibid, p.31.

The first North American focus for Oblate activities was the Canadian Northwest; in particular the Red River Settlement. The Red River colony which began for dispossessed Highlanders, developed into a mosaic of cultures, languages, and races involving a subsistence economy the heart of which was the buffalo hunt. The Red River settlement attracted many Métis families, ex-company servants seeking to remain in the Northwest with their Indian wives, and children and tripmen or hunters for whom Red River provided a perfect locale for their activities.

It was with the arrival of the Oblates at Red River that the "mission ambulante" became more common and popular. At the request of Bishop Bourget of Québec, the "Oblats de Marie Immaculée" arrived in the North West in 1841. Bourget, unable to recruit enough priests from Canada, sought new recruits to evangelize and civilize the North West in other locales. While in France, Bishop Bourget discovered the Oblates and decided to organize, with the group's founder, de Mazenod, missionaries destined for the new world.[10] The situation was mutually beneficial. Bourget received French speaking Catholic missionaries with ultramontane foundations, and de Mazenod had employment for his recruits and a market for their services.

The first two Oblates arrived in Red River in 1845: Alexandre Taché, who was to become instrumental in the affairs of the plains Métis, and Pierre Aubert. Under the direction of Bishop Provencher, now in charge of the vast bishopric known as Juliopolis and coadjucator to the Québec diocese, the Oblates were aggressively recruited from then on. Once the Oblates had been dispatched, it became obvious that setting up missions in the surrounding area of Red River was the first step to extending the Catholic influences among the Métis and Indians. With a mission as a home base the Oblates would journey regularly to contiguous areas of Métis/Native groupings, to temporary mission stations and to trading

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[9] Ibid., p.21.

posts where homeguard Indians[11] were regular participants in the affairs of the posts. Thus, despite permanent missions, the Oblates ventured out to service surrounding people. Furthermore, Protestant competition forced the Oblates to continually expand their services outside of the established missions.

The practice of following the wintering bands out to the prairie on their annual hunts, though undertaken by priests like Belcourt, did not become regularized until the 1840s. It became common when a shift in need developed as the buffalo robe trade became an integral part of the economy for Métis hunters and traders. Once this shift occurred, transforming the Métis subsistence economy, the hunters were away in the prairie more frequently and in larger groups; the Oblates responded in kind.

The "mission ambulante" consisted of missionaries following the Métis and aboriginal hunters out onto the prairie for longer periods of time, in effect establishing a roaming mission. It was discovered through practice that the plains Métis received maximum exposure to the Catholic mission, education, and sedentary agricultural during this moving mission. It was an adaptive response to the nomadic ways of the plains Métis. So despite their previous ideological attachment to sedentarism, some Oblates perceptively adapted to the moving mission to how the plains Métis adapted to the resources and climate of the plains. It seemed the most natural way of providing the Métis with social cohesion and religious structure and it gave the Oblate the opportunity to serve as they desired.

The moving mission, as an active engagement with the Métis buffalo hunt, was pioneered by those few missionaries who believed in its inherent usefulness, those who had the wherewithal to partake, and could adopt the view that to accompany the Métis in their hunt would empower the Métis, the Oblate, and the mission. The Oblates supported notions of sedentary agricultural development, reading, writing and Christianity, as defined by the

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[10] Robert Choquette, The Oblate Assault on Canada's Northwest (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1995), p.16.

European missionary frame of reference; but this notion of mission was only nominally successful given that the plains Métis families were a transient population who followed the buffalo. As a result, some aspects of the 'civilization' imperative had to be deferred. Competing requirements left limited resources of time, missionaries, mission buildings, and subsistence for all involved. This forced some Oblates to consider a more frugal approach to the task at hand. The "mission ambulante" provided a more efficient use of missionary resources and promised to have better results, catching the Métis in a receptive frame of mind. As Albert Lacombe stated:

> . . . je suis heureux d'aller endurer les rigeures de la saison, dans les camps de ses pauvres misérables. C'est peut-être le moment et la circonstance la plus favorable pour les appelles à Dieu, la misère et le froid ont engourdi leurs corps et leurs passions, sans compter que sur les souffrances du missionaires, touchant ces coeurs si indifférents d'ailleurs.[12]
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> . . . I am happy to go and endure the rigors of the season in the camps of these poor miserables. It is perhaps the moment and the circumstance most favorable to God to call, as the miserable cold surrounds their bodies and passions, with nothing more to count on than the missionaries suffering, which touches their hearts otherwise indifferent.

At first glance, the "mission ambulante" seems at cross-purposes to the philosophical directives of the Oblates, if in fact civilization, in European terms, was the goal. The "mission ambulante" was nomadic, it isolated the clergy from one another as often each Oblate stayed with his wintering group and only reunited with other Oblates sporadically, and it did not encourage agricultural activity. But in the prioritized philosophical goals of the Oblates the prime purpose was to save souls and some viewed this as the best alternative. It would appear that the "mission ambulante" forsook all other trimmings of civilization for the first step, the prime directive, the reason each Oblate was willing to risk and devote his entire life to a wilderness abroad...a soul. Despite the seemingly discordant aspects of what the Oblate was trying to accomplish, the commitment

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[11] The Homeguard Indians were Indians who lived around the posts and supplied provisions.

and zeal of the few Oblates who partook in the wintering adventures and the "mission ambulante" were in fact very true to the essence of the Oblate mission in the North West.

The essence of Oblate education and the state of affairs in France at the time the missionaries were educated had some bearing on the philosophies, views and personalities of the Oblates entering their mission in the North West. The situation in France was difficult. The French Revolution had left all seminaries in need of new students and the few who had been instructed to be Priests unable ready to fill the void created by the French Revolution. The democratic revolution of 1848 also marked the division, among French theologists, priests and Catholics in general, between liberal attitudes which supported the beginnings of the separation of the church and state and the ultramontane mindset that defended the prerogatives of church in the affairs of the state.[13] It was from this school of thought that the individual Oblats de Marie Immaculée emerged. In addition, the theological departments of the Universities had been shut down since the end of the 'Ancient Regime' and therefore the departments which usually fed the seminaries were also not producing any graduates. Since the departments had closed for such a long period, there was a lack of professors to even begin filling positions at the theological level of each University. France was certainly in a time of dearth concerning their religious orders.[14]

The result was that priests and missionaries destined for abroad were being taught quickly and with the minimum of what would have been expected before the French Revolution. During the time of the Restoration, the great demand for priests was the most pressing issue and though efforts were made to rectify the shortage, it was still the case that there were fewer priests than required. The minimum instruction for overseas missionaries involved the theology and the science of missionary work. What was normally covered in

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[12] Letter from Father Albert Lacombe to Taché December 26,1868. Archives of The Historical Society of St. Boniface, Fonds Taché, T6162.

[13] Claude Champagne, Les Débuts de la mission dans le Nord-Ouest canadien: Mission et Église chez Mgr. Vtal Grandin, o.m.i. (1829-1902) (Ottawa: Université de St.Paul, 1983), 22.

four years was reduced to two years,[15] and the main focus had to be morality rather than dogma.

> (. . .) les prêtres européens, une fois en Chine ou aux Indes, sont en quelque sorte des évêques auprés des prêtres indigènes, il faut qu'ils dirigent et les conduisent pour tout, et puis nous n'avons pas comme en France des livres, ou des confrères à consulter au besoin, il faut donc que nous soyons instruits pour la morale surtout.[16]
>
> (. . .)European priests, once in China or India, are in some ways the bishop to the indigenous priests, we have to direct and conduct them in everything, and we do not have, like in France, any books or colleagues to consult with as we would require, we have to therefore be fully instructed in morality above all.

The philosophy of the Oblates at this point in time was affected by all the events in France during and after the French Revolution, as well as the instruction received prior to being assigned to missions abroad. The Oblates in particular had, in addition to their ultramontane tones, a dedication to learning the language or languages of their mission, a commitment to prayer and fasting as preparatory to external missions, a commitment to administering to the poor, and an in-depth knowledge of morality.[17] It was these main commitments gave them the advantage over their Protestant brethren. All Oblates learned, with varying facility, the Indian languages; they all ministered to the poor and were thus able to live in the most dire circumstances. They were committed first and foremost to the morality of the mission and the individual soul. They were trained for difficult circumstances yet maintained an ideal of their mission goals.

The idealized mission experience was perhaps quite cohesive and clear. The goals of sedentarism in conjunction with an agricultural economy and the transmission of civilization were the hopes of the Oblates arriving in the North West. Their philosophies, as per the trends at the time, predisposed these Oblates to believe in the important role of the church in

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[14] Ibid p.21.
[15] Ibid p.30.
[16] Vital Grandin. a son frère, 22 Novembre 1851 (E.G.,24,9), as found in Claude Champagne, Les Débuts de la mission dans le Nord-Ouest canadien: Mission et Église chez Mgr. Vital Grandin, o.m.i. p.25

the affairs of the state and this included education and civilization. There existed a set expectation for the development of a heathen into a fully Christianized, civilized, and functional member of society. It was unclear in what order this process would take place, but that Christianization, civilization, education, and agricultural activity would take place was unquestionable and seen as inevitable.

The idealized version of the mission was not possible in the North West. Though the Oblate ministry focused on the poor in France, they had never encountered nomadism and what they considered a lack of civilization. The nomadism or transhumance of the Native populations in the Northwest, however, threatened the entire ideal, as without a parish to serve, there was no mission. Families did not stay in a single center of activity year after year as did the farmers of France. Métis families moved about in pursuit of their livelihood and though a family might settle for part of the year, their lifestyle was nomadic in essence and purpose. Sustenance was derived from a mobile herd of buffalo. Furthermore, the children accompanied the hunters every year and in order to educate and civilize the children, the Oblate had to join the family. Some Oblates, as the buffalo herds moved farther and farther south and west, addressed this issue by simply following the Métis hunters for entire seasons at a time. But this adaptation was not without its difficulties both physically and philosophically

The difficulty of the wintering experience can be seen in all of the Oblates writings. As the wintering bands became larger and stays on the prairie were lengthened, the Oblates felt obligated to stay with the large group of winterers, assisting them in catechism, regular schooling for the children, and regular services. Father Lacombe put it succinctly when he wrote:

> Aussitôt que je pourrai me débarrasser de mon ouvrage ici, je partirai, pour la prairie, pour enjoindre le gros camp de mes sauvages. À la fin de l'automne, nous tâcherons de nous rencontrer ici le P. André et moi,

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[17] Claude Champagne, Les Débuts..., p. 27

> pour nous reposer un peu, et puis encore repartir. [18]
>
> As soon as I can be rid of this work here, I will leave to join my savages at the big camp on the prairie. At the end of Autumn we will try to meet back here, Father André and I, for a short rest, then we are off again.

Albert Lacombe also described a time when he suffered greatly due to his willingness to winter:

> Parti de cette mission au commencement de Décembre dernier pour aller rejoindre nos sauvages dans la prairie, le bon Dieu a bien voulu me soumettre a une grande jeûne et me fait souffrir de faim pendant vingt jours.[19]
>
> Once I left at the beginning of last December to join my savages on the prairie, the good Lord had wanted that I fast and made me suffer from hunger for twenty days.

The schedule was grueling and the demands of the "ambulante" mission were excessive. At times over 100 families would gather in one hunting band and all of the needs of the group would be met by one missionary. This often involved schooling the young children, which in a group that size meant many children, as well as all other priestly duties. Though the Métis hunters took care of their priests with accommodations, food and clothing, the "ambulante" mission was more work than parish life and the sedentary mission. As Lestanc states:

> . . . je trouve la vie accablante; les dangers de la solitude m'épouvantent; les soupires du cher P. Decorby trouvent dans mon coeur un echo bien sympathique. . .[20]
> . . . I find this life overwhelming; the danger of my solitude dreadful; and the sighs expressed by dear Father Decorby strike a sympathetic cord. . .

The sedentary mission offered breaks, that is times when entire groups left the mission to hunt, support from other Fathers, and regularity. But with the hunting parties, there were no times when the missionary had nothing to accomplish. The "mission ambulante", however,

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[18] Letter from Lacombe to Bishop Taché, August 18,1864. Mission de St. Paul des Cris, Archives of The Historical Society of St. Boniface, Fonds Taché, p. T56645.
[19] Letter from Lacombe to Bishop Taché, April 29, 1868. Mission de St. Paul des Cris, Archives of The Historical Society of St. Boniface, Fonds Taché, p. T5522.

did have some advantages. The consistency of this mission was encouraging, because unlike the mission station of the established populations who left periodically for hunting, this mission was always close to its members who were eager for the services of the missionary. These groups of wintering hunters would not pick up and leave, at least not without bringing their missionary with them.

It was for this reason the "mission ambulante" was effective. More regular and consistent teaching was derived from this nomadic lifestyle. But, according to some of the records, the Bishop became concerned that the presence of a missionary among the winterers encouraged more to winter for longer and therefore invited nomadism among the Métis. This was a contradiction of the basic goal of the missionary. Wintering and the "mission ambulante" thus became a crisis in the philosophy of the Oblates. If the Oblate goal was civilization, sedentarism, agriculturalism, and Christianity, and the "mission ambulante" was encouraging the Métis to continue wintering and hence nomadism, how could the wintering Oblate rationalize his action? But the facts told the truth: the Métis and the Indians loved having a missionary among them.

> Nos bons hivernants nous ont accueillis avec la plus vive joie; la nouvelle de mon arrivée avait déja attiré au bout des bois un grand nombre de Sioux
>
> Our good winterers have received us with a most exciting joy; the news of our arrival had already attracted, from the ends of the woods, a great number of Sioux.[21]

Oblate authorities, however, did not always support the efforts of the "ambulant" missionaries and at various times, due to the difficulty of the wintering life, threatened to disallow them to continue wintering among the Métis hunting families. It was at this point that the "hivernants" priests defended the "mission ambulante" explaining the enormous

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[20] Letter from Lestanc to Bishop Taché, April 6 1874. Archives of The Historical Society of St. Boniface, Fonds Taché, T14076.

[21] Letter from André to Taché, December 29,1863. Archives of the Histoical Society of St. Boniface, Fonds Taché, T2550.

benefit of their missions and the need for their presence among the Métis. These letters clearly identify the very substance and commitment of the Oblates in question. When Vital Grandin suggested that 1874 would be the last year Father Lestanc would winter among the Métis, Lestanc appealed to Bishop Taché to intercede.[22] The Oblates, he argued, should not abandon this population in which he had spent his last four years, and that perhaps, if they were worried about him, they could always send another to replace him. He reiterated that it was not his presence that was encouraging the Métis to winter. The Métis would winter with or without a priest. He adamantly stated that his presence did not increase the Métis bands and that his absence would not diminish the number of winterers. The absence of a priest would only have the effect of dispersing the Métis population among the Indians where they would return to "savagery or infidelity."[23]

Missionary work to the Northwest attracted a unique type of person. The courage of conviction required to embark on a long journey over the seas, to immerse oneself in a completely unknown culture, climate, language and way of life, and to endure a great many difficulties and live with little luxury, set the missionary outside of a standard group of people. Of these missionaries, five stand out as remarkable in their efforts to convert and minister to the plains Métis. This study examines the lives and efforts of Father Alexis André, Father Albert Lacombe, Father Jules Decorby, Father Jean-Marie Le Floc'h, and Father Jean-Marie Lestanc. These five Oblates, in particular, capitalized on the concentration of the Métis in their wintering bands in order to resolve the conflict created by the difference between the idea mission experience in France and the reality of the North West mission experience.

These five Oblates also shared their interest in the Métis with two other significant members of the Oblate order. Though Alexandre Taché and Vital Grandin were mostly

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[22] Letter from Lestanc to Taché, April 6,1874. Archives of the Historical Society of St. Boniface, Fonds Taché, T14076.
[23] Ibid., T14077.

involved in the lives of the Métis at Red River and St. Albert respectively, and did not usually accompany the Métis on the wintering hunts, they both nonetheless were active participants in the lives of the Métis plains hunters. Most of the writings about the Métis from the wintering Oblates were addressed to either Taché or Grandin. Therefore, within the larger body of writings concerning the Métis, this study also examines the writings of Taché and Grandin.

It is important to understand and appreciate the characters and beliefs of the five Oblates because these beliefs had two major implications in the study at hand. First, each Oblate brought with him a set of beliefs and skills which affected their perceptions and perspectives. Second, their viewpoints, characters, and skills shaped their relationships with the Métis hunters in such a way that it may have improved or perhaps at times hindered the practical advancement of the Métis toward the Oblates' goal of Christianizing, civilizing and generally educating the Métis. Remembering that these five Oblates were special simply by virtue of engaging in the buffalo hunt during the winter lends credence to their individuality and their common skills, which in turn affected a common interpretation of the Métis.

Father Jules Decorby, born in France in 1841, arrived in the North West in 1867. After a brief stay in St. Norbert, Manitoba, he was sent to Lebret, Saskatchewan, known as Fort Qu'Appelle. From this mission station he wintered with the buffalo hunters from 1874-1878 and then again in Cypress Hills in 1877, in Touchwood Hills and in Willow Bunch, all popular Métis wintering sites. [24] Father Decorby spoke five modern languages and at one point ministered to a mixed population. He was an exceptional Father among the Oblates as his command of different languages furnished him with the skills necessary to minister to a wide variety of groups. It had been an Oblate pre-requisite that they learn indigenous languages so as to properly immerse themselves into the mindset and language

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[24] Gaston Carrière, o.m.i , Le Dictionnaire Biographique des Oblats de Matie Immaculées au Canada (Ottawa: Éditions de l'University D'Ottawa, 1976) Tome 2, p. 260.

coding of their parishioners, but few had had such a proclivity toward language learning and retention. The facility in Native languages gave Decorby an insider view of the culture itself. Language held the key, the map, the legend to the beliefs, culture, and overall paradigm of the group involved. Therefore, to understand and function in a language was not only useful in a practical sense, but it contributed to the insider view of the religious and spiritual challenges that the parishioners faced. With language, one could more effectively understand and therefore span the vast gap of beliefs and experiences. For example, in one of Father Lacombe's letters to his superior, he states that a Father Caen would not be asked back out to winter with the Métis on the prairie because his learning of Cree was delayed and he was not catching on very well.[25]

The tone of Decorby's correspondence with Vital Grandin was very much to the point with little emotive expression. He stated the facts of his mission, the number of Métis families he was teaching, the surrounding Indian families, the numbers of baptisms, communions, his efforts with the mission and his activities. His writings were so much to the point that he, unlike many of the others, seldom spoke of other wintering Oblates. But when news was received that the Bishop was thinking of moving him to another mission, it was clear that his level of commitment and concern for the Métis was nonetheless paramount.

> J'ai reçu hier une lettre de P. Lacombe disant que votre volonté très determinée et celle de votre conseil était de me renvoyer au Lac. Cette nouvelle nous surprent tous ici et nous désappointe fort. . . . Et pour notre hivernement j'ai fait des promesses aux Métis . . .[26]
>
> I received a letter yesterday from Father Lacombe saying that you were determined as was your council to send me to the Lake. This news really surprised everyone here and also strongly disappointed us. . . . And the winterers, I made some promises to the Métis. . .

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[25] Letter from Lacombe to Vital Grandin, December 31, 1861. Archives of The Historical Society of St. Boniface, Fonds Taché, p.T1053.

[26] Letter from Decorby to Vital Grandin, August 22, 1880. Archives of The Historical Society of St. Boniface, Fonds Taché, p. T24355-56.

Father Decorby's last sentence was very telling. He had made some promises which he took seriously to people he respected and to whom he felt affection and responsibility. He could not come and go as he pleased, nor did he want to. He had begun a relationship with his Métis and to them he was committed and though the groups often consisted of both Métis and Indian hunters, Decorby addressed only the Métis. He maintained an insider perspective of the Métis. He belonged among them and they were not a depersonalized group, but a family of people for whom he held affection.

On the other hand, Father Albert Lacombe, the only one of the five who was born on the Canadian continent, spoke often of others. After his arrival to the North West, Lacombe became the vicar-general of both St.Albert, which was named after him, and St. Boniface, Winnipeg. In 1864, he began his mission to evangelize the Cree and Blackfoot, and therefore he was almost continually among the wintering communities of the plains[27] and reported to the superior concerning the affairs of winterers and their Oblates. Conflicts that arose among the Oblates in the "mission ambulante" and between them and their superior were the responsibility of Albert Lacombe. Therefore, throughout his writings, he mentioned the work of the other Oblates, and he mediated the contentious issues that arose. Moreover, his tone with the superior was also very conciliatory and respectful, as he was often the one making requests for various mission stations. For example, in his letters he would often mention his attachment to Archbishop Taché.

> Car je puis vous assurer que depuis mon départ de St. Boniface, pendant les longues et ennuyantes journées, sur ma charrette, ou a cheval, il ne s'est pas beaucoup passe des jours, sans que je me suis transporte d'èsprit auprès de V.G. (Votre Grace) pour me rappeller de tout ce qu'Elle m'a dit, alors que j'étais à la fatigue par mes misères. . .[28]
>
> I can assure you that since my departure from St. Boniface, during long and boring hours on my cart or horse, there were few days that passed where my spirit was not transported to you in remembering your words

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[27] Gaston Carriere,o.m.i, Le Dictionnaire Bibliographique, p. 219.

[28] Letter from Lacombe to Taché August 7,1862. Archives of The Historical Society of St. Boniface, Fonds Taché, p. T1568.

while I was exhausted with misery. . .

More than any other of the five Oblates involved in this study, Lacombe's tone borders on adoration for his superior and he often ended his correspondences with 'your devoted missionary'; Taché, for him, was God's earthly representative of the only true religion, and he treated him as such. His paradigm would seem very much like the patriarchal devotion and love one would have for a father or the Lord Father himself. This would have been in keeping with common beliefs of the Father/Son relationship between God and his flock. This paradigm was further evident in his treatment of the Métis and Oblate expectations of the Métis. The priest was God's representative and the Métis were the recipients of his devotion, somewhat like the earthly father/son relationship. The priest was the mentor, the tutor and the devoted servant, to whom the less evolved Métis (in terms of civilization, manners, modernity, and religiosity) should pay due respect.

Later in his relationship with the Métis, Lacombe interceded with the government on their behalf. In 1875, Father Lacombe addressed a letter to the Minister of the Interior on behalf of the Métis and their ever deteriorating situation on the plains caused by the disappearance of the buffalo. Though his tone with the government was significantly altered from his correspondence to his superior, he nonetheless took a supplicatory tone. Throughout all of his correspondence, however, his assessment of the Métis was phrased in brotherly and charitable terms. Criticisms of their behavior were tempered with reasonable explanations about the true limitations of their situation. Over time, it was Lacombe who

continued to intercede on behalf of the Métis as the buffalo disappeared.[29] What was telling about Lacombe's personality was that he interceded for the Métis and that his role as protector, mediator fit his paradigm of the teacher, mentor, and father-like figure who responded to the less capable, less mature little brother, naive to the ways of the world: the Métis.

Father Jean-Marie LeFloc'h, was born in France in 1823. He did some mission work in France before joining the newly founded Oblates of Mary Immaculate. He arrived in the North West in 1857 and he was stationed in St. Boniface first, then re-located in 1859 to St. Ann des Chènes, Manitoba where he was among the Métis.[30] Father LeFloc'h was the most disruptive to the harmony and consistency of the Oblate missionary effort of the five investigated. It would appear from his correspondence, that he and Father Lestanc had some kind of row and that the news was forwarded to the Superior. This conflict between LeFloc'h and Father Lestanc was discussed and mentioned in others' correspondence. Father André noted some of LeFloc'h's failings:

> Ce dernier va un peu comme le temps. Aujourd'hui gai, demain sombre, après demain de mauvaise humeur. Du reste vous avez eu le temps de le connaître, et je crois qu'il faudra toujours une bonne d'abnégation pour être son compagnon et surtout son second.[31]
>
> He is a little like the weather. Today happy, tomorrow sombre, the day after tomorrow in a bad mood. You have had the time to get to know him, and I believe it would require someone fairly selfless to be his companion or especially his second.

Father LeFloc'h's character was somewhat abrasive and temperamental, so much so that even Father Lacombe commented on his personality, recounting to Taché an attempt by LeFloc'h to discuss his ill sentiments about Father Lestanc. The conflict seemed to dwindle

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[29] Letter of Lacombe (St.Albert) to David Laird, Minister of the Interior, April 5, 1875. NA, RG10, Vol.3622, file 4953.

[30] Gaston Carrière, Le Dictionnaire Biographique, p. 295

[31] Letter from Lestanc to Taché, August 15,1861. Archives of The Historical Society of St. Boniface, Fonds Taché, p.T0754.

over time and in a letter from Lestanc to Taché, Lestanc states that Father LeFloc'h seemed to have become more respectful toward him and that he seemed more zealous for his mission.[32]

What was notable about Father LeFloc'h's correspondence was his candor. His character was such that he expressed the whole truth about his mission, both good and bad. He spoke at length about the hours he kept, the exhaustion, and the trials and tribulations. But these truths were not always well received. Unlike Father Lacombe, he did not manage his negativity as well, and his writings clearly indicated that he was struggling. Admittedly, the task at hand was extremely arduous, and from his perspective, the lack of support from his colleagues, did not help. For example, in a letter from Father Lestanc to Taché, Lestanc states:

> Le père LeFloc'h est un peu sous le régime de la terreur panique. Il craint q'uà l'arrivée de votre Grandeur, il n'y ait plaintes contre lui de tout côtés. Oh! Vraiment ce frère est souple, quand on lui montre qu'on peut se passer de lui![33]
>
> Father LeFloc'h is a little under the influence of a terrorizing panic. He fears that upon your arrival, there will be nothing but complaints about him from all sides. Oh! Truly this Father is flexible when he sees that we can do without him!

It was notable that every other Father discussed Father LeFloc'h in their correspondences with Superior Taché. The very fact that he caused agitation, concern and written comment suggests that he was a person who affected others. Clearly, he balked at a few of the unwritten rules of conduct among the Oblates. At one point in a letter to Taché, LeFloc'h states that though he would stop writing about the good and the bad if Taché requested it, he felt it was his responsibility to inform Father Taché of both sides of his mission. In other words, he was telling the whole truth. Arguably, this was not a significant aspect of LeFloc'h's personality, but it was likely one of the traits that made him popular among the

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[32] Letter from Lestanc to Taché, December 27,1861. Archives of The Historical Society of St. Boniface, Fonds Taché, p.T1036.

[33] Letter from Lestanc to Taché, January 29,1862. Archives of The Historical Society of St. Boniface, Fonds Taché, p. T1135.

Métis. After all, the Métis themselves, by their very nature, were balking at the status quo by not choosing a European or Indian path. It would appear that Father LeFloc'h was somewhat of a rebel himself, but the question was. . . to whom? If the plains Métis did not like a particular Father, they simply asked that he not return. This was not the case with LeFloc'h. He returned to the wintering communities for at least a few years.

Father Joseph Lestanc was born in 1830 in France and after studying in various seminaries, he arrived in St. Boniface in 1855. He was stationed at Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan with the buffalo hunters but also traveled to Cypress Hills and Willow Bunch.[34] In the case of Father Lestanc, as opposed to Father LeFloc'h, the other Fathers seemed to like him, but the Métis had some trouble with him. At one point, his letters address the issue of certain Métis leaders not liking him and being critical of him; but the letters do not identify exactly what they were complaining about. From what is written, it appeared that he was a little over-zealous and critical of the Métis' lack of dedication to catechism and their drinking on a regular basis. The entirety of his correspondence, however, has the tone reminiscent of the Father/Son relationship. For instance he stated after mentioning a few Métis that disliked him:

> . . .je pardonne à tous, et, si je vous revois, je vous sérrerai la main avec une cordialité de père qui sent, malgré lui qu'il aime ses enfants quelques méchants quelques-uns. Mon puissent être; un père ne peut hair son enfants-Le cependant cette grace, m'est refusée, je veux aller mourir chez vous; je veux reposer au milieu de mes enfants bien aimés.[35]
>
> . . . I forgive all, and if I saw you again, I would shake your hand cordially like a father who, despite himself, loves his children, some though they may be mean. Powerful being, a father cannot hate his own children-But despite this grace, it cannot be refused, that I want to die among you, I want to be laid to rest among my beloved children.

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[34] Gaston Carrière, Le Dictionnaire Biographique, p. 322

[35] Letter from Father Lestanc to Taché, February 26,1862. Archives of The Historical Society of St. Boniface, Fonds Taché, T1212.

It was the Father/Son relationship that involved mentoring, raising, and disciplining, as would a biological father, but projected onto an entire group of Métis. It is reasonable that, as with petulant children, the Métis would at times dislike, even hate, their own father. But the father, as Lestanc's asserted, would never hate them back. Furthermore, Lestanc sometimes closed with "De votre Grandeur, Le tres devoue fils" which translated was "Of your Greatness, your very devoted son".[36]

Father Alexis André was born in France in 1833 and arrived in Red River in 1861. During this time, he followed the hunting parties from Pembina and from 1867-71 from Saint Paul des Cris.[37] Father André, of all the five Oblates, most loved the Métis and the Métis loved him in return. When the philosophical issues of the hunt, the difficulty of wintering, and the enormous workload each Oblate took on was assessed, it was clear that each Oblate loved the Métis. But with Father André we have it stated in a letter from Father Lestanc to Taché:

> Le P. André est un prêcheur! Ah! Oui! "Il prêche près que ausi bien que Monseigneur." Il a été très aimé ici. À la Montagne de Bois, ils n'ont aucun crainte que de le perdre. Il y est très aimé, et il aime beaucoup ce peuple qu'il manie, comme il . .[38]
>
> Father André is a preacher! Oh! Yes! "He preaches almost as well as you Father" He was well loved here. At Wood Mountain their only worry is that they will lose him. He is well loved and he loves the people here a lot.

As such, Father André is a particularly good example of the intense relationship that developed between the Métis and their Oblate Fathers.

That the wintering experience and the mission among the winterers affected the Oblates' view of the Métis cannot be disputed. The Oblates studied here spent extended periods of time among the wintering communities and they developed an intense attachment

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[36] Letter from Lestanc to Bishop Taché, January 29,1862. Archives of The Historical Society of St. Boniface, Fonds Taché, T1135.

[37] Gaston Carrière, Dictionnaire Bibliographique, Tome 2... p. 26

[38] Letter from Lestanc to Taché December 27,1863. Archives of The Historical Society of St. Boniface, Fonds Taché, pT1038.

to their Métis. All of the Oblates developed a deep affection for their winterers and were deeply committed to their cause. This relationship was markedly different than the relationships which developed in other less remote mission stations where life and limb were not threatened to the same extent. The result for the Oblates was that their views of the Métis were altered. Their view or construction of the Métis was then disseminated to the outer world through letters to their superior whose writings were broadly read, but also, that view was reflected back onto the Métis themselves which in turn affected the way the Métis viewed themselves. Whether it was the dissemination of a Métis construction or the reflected image, both had a part in the development of the Métis as a people, and how the outside world understood them.

Chapter 5: Oblate Constructions of the Métis 'Other'.

The interaction with and the writings about the Métis by the Oblates produced a particular portrait of the Métis, one that exhibits the multi-faceted nature of defining the 'other'. Though the term 'construction' implies an active and conscious building, it has an unconscious aspect also. Not all constructions of a Métisness would have been consciously undertaken. The Oblates involved in this study were affected by the intellectual trends of the day, the historical context of the time, and their own worldview, which in turn affected the way they constructed the Métis. Moreover, the Oblates were involved in an overt attempt to define the other with notions of civilization, Catholicism, and hybridity. Concepts of Métisness, like concepts of madness, medicine, nation, state, body, and sex are not categories that can be conceptualized in terms of universals whose content is an immutable definition. They are historically given or 'discursive objects' and are historically grounded.[1] Persons of mixed Indian and European (white) ancestry were not naturally Métis; they could and did identify themselves and were identified by others as Indian and, in some cases, as white. Métisness was not only a form of self-identification and construction, but also a case of outside construction-a discursive formation. The aim in this chapter is to examine and analyze the nature of the Oblate construction of the Métis as a discursive object or subject as a new strategy for reading Oblate missionary texts.

The writings of the Oblates during their missions to what we now call Canada were varied and represented different aspects of Oblate communications. Letters were written between Oblate missionaries strictly for friendship and communication in an isolated environment. Others were written to the superior keeping him abreast of activities and

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[1] This insight comes from Michel Foucault's critique of the fundamental assumptions of social history. See introduction to Lynn Hunt (ed.) The New Cultural History (Berkeley:University of California Press, 1989), p.7; and Roger Chartier, "Intellectual History or Sociocultural History? The French Trajectories," in Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisal and New Perspective (Ithaca: N.Y., 1982), p.30.

requesting supplies. Still others were written for the purpose of promoting the missions and were public relations communications for charitable donations in Europe. Some of the more public writings were distilled from writings to the superior and then disseminated throughout the literate world, but all writings whether to the superior or to the contributors in Europe, reflected an Oblate construction of Métis identity. In some cases they were perhaps distilled, in other cases fashioned for public consumption, but always constructed at the hand of the Oblate himself. The Oblate views of the Métis in the context of the "hivernant" communities during the period of 1830-1880 was of a somewhat different nature. The wintering Oblates were "insiders" to the community experience and were affected by this intense adventure, whereas those Oblates who did not partake in wintering were "outsiders" and had a distinct perspective.

The sources investigated and gathered from the five wintering Oblates in this study for the period of 1830-1880 emphasized several themes indicative of the intensity and nature of the Oblate/Métis relationship and the Oblate construction of Métis identity. First, the concept of the civilization and the ideas which governed this paradigm were pervasive in all the materials. The savage/civilized dichotomy derived from the intellectual thought of the time affected the way the Oblates viewed the world and the Métis' role in that world. Furthermore, the Oblate administrators believed that the nomadic or transhuman nature of the Métis' lifestyle was in keeping with the more savage aspect of their identity. This was considered a barrier to full civilization as defined in European terms and the Oblate records were replete with suggestions to curb this "savage" way of life. Next, the concept of miscegenation and how this influenced the Oblate view of the Métis is paramount to this thesis. Oblate views on miscegenation produced a perspective of the Métis which linked blood mixing with a variety of character and behavioral traits. The middle ground brought about by mixing of blood and culture was in fact seen as contributing to the ambivalent, inconsistent, and even confused behavior of the Métis. These conceptual themes taken from

the materials written by Oblates were pervasive and irrefutably part of Oblate construction of Métis identity.

Concepts of miscegenation and the savage/civilization paradigm were transformed and changeable depending upon the purpose of the writings and the person holding the ink pot. Three types of sources were studied in order to establish the themes in this chapter. There are all the letters written by each of the five Oblates in question to Mgr. Taché while they were in the wintering villages engaging in the "mission ambulante." Then there were the letters written to Paris, the head office of Les Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires des Oblats de Marie Immaculée which were usually written by Bishop Grandin for dissemination among other missions abroad and European countries. These letters were also distributed to congregations known for their donations to the cause, and these letters functioned to keep the donators abreast of the successes of the Missions. Finally, the third body of writings were written by Mgr. Taché himself and involved correspondences for both public, as in the NorthWest, and more private appeal. Taché, Bishop of St. Boniface, was a very involved Mgr. and he was one of the first priests to come to the North West. His experiences during the first part of his career were always of a first-hand nature, yet he later settled into a more removed and administrative role. He seemed at times to function as an insider and at other times as an outsider to the Plains Métis.

The production of the Oblate archive occurred in the following way. The Oblate would arrive in a Mission and correspond with the Superior on a regular basis. These correspondences represented reports on progress and activities. These reports were sometimes excerpted for publication in the Oblate publication such as Missions de la Congregation des Missionnaires de Marie Immaculée. As well, Mgr. Taché seemed, especially where the Métis were concerned, interested in reformulating the information into yet other works like his Sketches of the NorthWest which contains an entire section the Métis. Each of these levels of communication produced specific constructions of Métisness.

Correspondence intended for Mgr. Alexandre Taché from each of the wintering Oblates was never derogatory of the Métis. In fact, not only were derogatory words seldom found, but many letters contained praise and expressed awe of the Métis strength and courage. Words like 'savage' are less frequently used and though there were tones of paternalism, they were less obvious and more subtle. These letters were not very descriptive, but pointed to a different relationship between the Oblate and the Métis from those sources written by administrators for external consumption. The Oblate while in these wintering communities was an insider, not an outsider looking on. There was no need to describe what was known, what the Oblate was part of.

The insider Oblates were always full of praise for the courage, strength and determination of the Métis in the wintering communities. Father André writing from Saint Boniface noted,

> Les Métis seuls conservent leur insouciance et ne semblent voir aucun danger pendant que la situation devient tous les jours plus menaçante autour de nous. Cependant, je ne épargnée ni avertissements ni remonstrances pour les prévenir et les envoyer à se tenir sur leur garde; mais mes paroles n'excitent que leur rire; loin de redouter les Sioux, ils font tout pour les attirer chez eux.[2]
>
> Only the Métis preserve their carefree attitude and do not seem to see any danger while the situation gets more menacing around us. Meanwhile, I will spare no warning, no remonstrance to forewarn them and send them on their guard; but my words excite their laughter; far from being on guard of the Sioux, they do everything to attract them.

Writing about the Métis hunt on the Missouri, Father André expressed admiration for their skill and boldness,

> ..et je ne pouvais revenir de ma surprise et de mon admiration de voir l'intrepidite avec laquelle les Metis attaquaient les terribles boeufs et l'adresse merveilleuse avec laquelle ils se combattaient...et avant de foncer comme ils disent, ile mettent tous pied a terre, et je recite l'acte de contrition avec quelques autres prieres, et puis le coeur content ils s'elancent tous...[3]

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[2] Letter to Taché from Alexis André, December 9,1862. Archives of The Historical Society of the St. Boniface, Fonds Taché, T1757.

> ...and I could hardly believe my surprise and my admiration to see the boldness with which the Métis attacked the terrible buffalo and the wonderful skill used in fighting...and before boring as they say, they put their feet to the ground, and I recite the act of contrition with a few other prayers, and then with happy hearts, they all take off...

On the other hand, sources which had been distilled through to the Missions and written specifically for Paris seemed to be less positive of the Métis in general and often more descriptive as the audience was not living among the Métis and required explanation of their behavior, situation and lifestyle. For instance in one letter written by Vital Grandin he explained his goals with the Métis and Indians:

> . . . c'est aussi ma préoccupation, mais je voudrais avant tout qu'on prit les moyens de changer en citoyens utiles et laborieux les sauvages du Nord-Ouest qui actuellement sont une lourde charge pour le gouvernement et peuvent arrêter beaucoup la civilisation du pays.[4]
>
> . . . it is also my preoccupation, but I would like before anything to take all mediums to change into useful and working citizens the savages of the North West who are actually a heavy burden for the government and can stop the civilization of the entire country.

What was evident about this passage as opposed to the passages that were written by wintering Fathers among the Métis, was both the tone and the purpose of each of the correspondences. In this passage, Vital Grandin was creating a synopsis of the goals of the Missions for outside interest and further funding. The letter grouped the Métis and the Indians into one uncivilized people; there was no personal tone in that Bishop Grandin was not speaking of a specific group or family that he was acquainted with; nor was there any sense of affection for the people he was speaking of. His aims were clear and broad with little interpersonal association with the Métis or the "savages." Grandin's tone was that of

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[3] Letter to Taché from Father Alexis André, By the Missouri, July 12,1862. Archives of The Historical Society of the St. Boniface, Fonds Taché, T1483-1484.

[44] Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires de Marie Immaculée, 21 st year, No 81.(March 1883), p.129.

an administrator engaged in the process of organizing and implementing a set of values and philosophies which were unquestionably viewed as more desirable than the ideas that were dearly held by the people he was administering to. But what was most telling was the lack of personal tone. Contrastingly, in all the correspondences from the wintering Fathers to Taché the tone was warm, concerned, though perhaps paternal. Each Oblate was involved in the lives of his people in an intimate way. This difference in tone and attachment marked a major deviation in the sources. Not only was the information being transmitted altered, but the nature of the relationship from which the Oblate was constructing his views of the Métis was also modified.

In the case of Oblate writings about the Indians and the Métis, not all correspondences were created equally. Letters written directly from the wintering communities to Mgr. Taché or Bishop Grandin and to colleagues were different in purpose and audience than those written for the Missions des Oblats de Marie Immaculée to be read in Paris and abroad. Therefore, all correspondences were written within a distinct context and must be viewed from that context. For instance in this letter from Father Lacombe during one of his travels in the North West he writes of the Métis from an "insider" perspective:

> Un jour, dans mes voyages, j'ai rencontré sur les bords d'un lac une famille métisse vivant entièrement comme des sauvages mais bien disposés a se faire chrétiens. Je demande au père s'il sait quelque chose du bon Dieu. "Je sais un peu le prier," dit-il. Et alors il me récite l'oraison dominicale et la salutation angèlique en latin que lui avait appris son vieux père qui vivait alors au milieu des sauvages. Malgré l'oubli des devoirs religieux, par l'éloignement des prètres et de l'Église, malgré les désordres et la démoralisation de nos anciens voyageurs, qui après s'étre éloignés du foyer domestique se trouvaient dans un pays sans loi, sans la crainte de Dieu et sans le respect de la moralité, il est consolant de savoir qu'ils n'avaient pas perdu la foi.
>
> One day, during my travels, I came across, on the edge of a lac, a métis family living entirely like savages but well disposed to being christians. I asked the father if he knew anything of God, and he responded 'I know how to pray to Him.' So we recited the Lord's Prayer in Latin taught to him by his father who had lived among the savages. Despite the loss of his religious duties, due to his isolation from the church and priests, despite the disorder and lack of morality of the voyageurs of old, who after being separated from their domestic homes and finding themselves in a country without laws or fear of God and with no respect for morality,

it was consoling to know that they had not lost their faith.[5]

This description was written from an insider perspective. He notes a warming experience after having traveled far and wide, and encountering a Métis family still maintaining Catholic teachings passed through their European forefather. From the passage, Lacombe exuded a sense of caring and respect for the challenges the family faced in having done so. On the other hand, the prior passage, written by Vital Grandin, Bishop of Saint-Albert, and therefore much more distant from the day-to-day events of the wintering communities, seemed disassociated. The facts were stated, the people involved had no names, no voice in the sense of a conversation, and they remained distant to the Bishop in that the information was proceeding through another Father and was distilled for external Missions publications. Grandin indicated by his words a distinct experience from the writer who was among the wintering Métis. For Grandin, the Bishopric was a project with many people, objectives, and general pursuits; for Father Lacombe, the people all had names and faces and the project was lived out on a daily basis. This insider/outsider perspective altered the nature of the writings and therefore the information transmitted.

Unlike administrators like Vital Grandin who were responsible for the funding, goals, and personnel of the Missions, the Oblates involved in the thick of the missions and the day to day activities had a close relationship with the Métis. They did not mistake nor group the Métis with the heathen Indians; the two were literally worlds apart. Their intimate knowledge of the Métis lifestyle and the Métis identity was as though they were a part of the community. Involved as they were in the nomadic or transhuman lifestyle, they did not view it as 'savage' as that of the Indians, but as an adaptation to the necessities of life on the plains and part of their national character. Furthermore, they viewed the Métis with admiration and respect in terms of their talents and similar language.

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[5] PAA,OMI, 71.220, Lacombe Mémoires, p.19-20.

Other factors affected the way the Métis were viewed. By the time the Oblates arrived on the continent there was some evidence of Christian influences that were remnants of the teachings of European fathers to their Métis children. This prior knowledge of Christianity made the Métis, in the eyes of the Oblate, more amenable to receive the one true God of Catholicism. Furthermore, the Oblates and the Métis shared a common language base. Though the Métis might speak several languages, as would the Oblate, they were both of French origin and they shared this fundamental commonality. The Métis were the wintering Oblates' golden children. They were expected to transfer information on behalf of the Oblates and they verily functioned as intermediaries and ambassadors of Catholicism. Due to the common ground between the Oblates and the Métis, the Métis were expected to behave more civilized, more Christian, more white, and based on the Oblate mindset at the time, this was a reasonable hope.

CIVILIZATION

The 'civilization' theme was prevalent among Europeans long before they settled on the North American continent. The entire notion of Imperialism and proseletization was fundamentally based on the view that the indigenous people were backward and needed salvation from their dire circumstances. [6] According to the Oblates administrators, and those that were outsiders to the intense wintering experience, the Métis were not simply savages, but they were poor savages who did not know any better. The savage/civilized paradigm was clear and well defined according to European standards. The savage was living in a nomadic state, usually with what Europeans would consider 'rough' housing, they were usually illiterate in the strictest sense, and their religious beliefs were considered pagan in that they

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[6] Robert J.C Young, Colonial Desire:Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race (New York:Routledge, 1995) p. 93.

were neither Christian or enlightened as to the concept of monotheism nor devoid of idolatry.

The main available source written by an insider Oblate that attempts to describe the "hivernant" experience in some detail reflects a more tempered interpretation of civilization and Métis development toward civilization. In fact, the term "civilization" is used to identify what the Métis were accomplishing among the Indians on the plains. 'Les hivernements,' written by the wintering Oblate Father Decorby speaks of the positive steps that the Métis had undertaken. For example, according to Father Decorby their efforts were praiseworthy:

> Il n'en est rien pourtant, et tout ce luxe ne tend qu'a se procurer un abri chaud pour quelques mois. Le sauvage non-baptisé et qui n'a aucune teinte de civilization est moins exigeant, et sa loge, dressée au fond d'un ravin, contraste étrangement par son état misérable avec les confortable maison du métis ou du sauvage chrétien; la propreté lui est inconnue.[7]
>
> All that must be accomplished is, without luxury, a warm shelter for a few months. The unbaptized savage, who has not even a hint of civilization, is less particular, and his lodging, built in a ravine, is in strange contrast by his miserable state to the comfortable houses of the métis or of the savage christian; cleanliness is unknown to them.

The Oblate civilization scheme involved several levels of behavioral and attitudinal changes proscribed for the Indian and Métis and the entire process of civilization took much longer and was more difficult than was first anticipated. The primary goal and philosophy of the administration was conversion, but conversion itself could not take place without education. Lessons in catechism were an important part of the educational and conversion process. Next, once a fair number of conversions created a Christian community, the goal was then to introduce sedentary agricultural activity. Nomadism was contrary to both goals and was viewed as a case in point for judging the progress of civilization. This was the European model of civilization and the Oblates' scheme did not fall far from that. Finally,

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[7] R.P. Decorby, "Les Hivernants" Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Marie Immaculée p.198-199.

the Oblates felt that it would be best that all new converts be assimilated into the greater population of Christian, civilized, and sedentary lifestyles. The goal was to transform the poor savages into civilized beings.

Conversion and education did not take place in the same fashion across the plains, and over time the ideas formulated at the administrative level were not always viewed the same out in the field. Initially, mission schools were set up to convert and educate both young children and their parents, but as the missionary began moving around the region and even wintering with the hivernants, mission schools seemed less effective. Furthermore, as the Oblate conversion scheme was either deemed successful or in some cases less so, tactics and implementation schemes were altered. But what the wintering Oblate and the administration judged as appropriate and helpful were not always the same. Mission schools were set up in the process of trying to civilize, christianize and assimilate the Métis and Indians. For instance, among the winterers, the Oblates greatest occupation remained catechism, as stated by the wintering Father Decorby:

> . . . catéchisme: occupation laborieuse de toutes facons, les enfants de la prairie étant loin d'avoir l'intelligence ouverte aux choses de la foi comme les enfants des écoles. Des familles qui voyages sans cesse n'offrent guère de resources pour l'instruction religieuse; il n'y a aucun travail préparatoire; le prêtre est obligé de tout faire et de donner jusqu'aux notions les plus élémentaires, soit pour les idées, soit pour les sens même des mots. [8]

> . . . catechism: laborious occupation in all senses, the children of the prairie being far from having an open mind to ideas of faith like children in schools. The families that are always traveling do not offer the resources for religious instruction; there is no preparatory work; the priest is obliged to do everything and to provide even the most elementary notions, of either ideas, and even of basic meaning of words.

But the focus in mission schools was quite a bit more intense as the Christianizing process was full-time and exclusionary of any outside interference from the Indian or Métis family

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[8] R.P. Decorby, "Les Hivernants" Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Marie Immaculée p. 193-194.

or community. In the case of the "hivernants," the Oblate missionaries lived among the Métis and Indians and they were very much a part of everyday life.

In those texts where the "hivernants" priests were speaking of education and Christianizing, the tone seems more forgiving, perhaps more aware of the challenges and less likely to judge the Métis and Indian as inferior due to their circumstance. But in the mission schools, the expectations were greater and the program more stringent. The inherent judgment was that only through more aggressive isolation from the effects of nomadism and savagery would these children be transformed. So the tone was more rigid, more harsh and the sources reflect the view of how civilization would occur: Mission schools among the conventional outsider Oblates, and dedication to catechism among wintering communities among the wintering insider Oblates exemplify the differing approaches to the proscribed goals of conversion, education, and ultimately civilization. Therefore, after repeated attempts at civilizing over the years with nominal success, more aggressive means were assumed as we can see in this passage written within the context of a mission school reflecting a much more negative view of the Indian and the Métis, creating a false dichotomy between the savage/civilizedchild:

> C'est d'une année à l'autre une transformation complète. Ces enfants leur viennent absolumant dépourvues de toute instruction et éducation famille, plusieurs ne sachant parler ni l'anglais ni le français et n'ayant pas le moindre connaissance des principles de notre sainte religion. Et comment n'en serait-il pas ainsi? La plupart d'entre elles sont nées de parents à moitié sauvages. Une creature indolente, paresseuse, sombre, maussade, negligée dans sa tenure, désobéissante et quelquefois vicieuse, se trouve transformée en une aimable enfant, proprette, studieuse, habile dans toutes les industries de son age et de son sexe, polie, obéissante et, par dessus tout, pieuse comme un ange.[9]
>
> From one year to the next there is a complete transformation. These children come to them absolutely lacking in all familial instruction and education, several of them not speaking either English nor French, and having even a minimum knowledge of the principles of our saint religion. And how could they be otherwise? Most of them were born to half savage parents. A creature that is indolent, lazy, somber, morose, physically neglected, disobedient and at times vicious, finds

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[9] Letter from R.P. McGuckin to R.P. Martinet, 27 november 1878. Mission of St. Joseph. Missions de la Congregation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculées, p. 210-211.

> himself transformed into a lovable, clean, studious, capable in all the industries of his age and sex, polite, obedient, and, above all, as pious as an angel.

The Oblate scheme of complete civilization included conversion, education and ultimately a transformation from savagery to a higher level of being. But the next goal, that of sedentarism was actually more difficult to manage in the context of the North West with so many variables at play, as noted by Grandin,

> J'ai visité à domicile notre population de St-Albert: j'ai trouvé 476 individus, ce qui me fait estimer la population à 500. C'est là le grand mal de nos Métis, nous ne pouvons les forcer définitivement: ils sont au moins 7 à 800 dans la prairie comme les sauvages.[10]
>
> I visited our population of St. Albert, at their home: I found 476 individuals, which causes me to estimate their population at 500. It is here the great problem with our Métis, we definitely cannot force them: they are from 7 to 800 in the prairie like savages.

Sedentarism was also not always something that both administrators and wintering Oblates agreed upon. It was the hope that schools would better prepare the Métis and Indians for the influx of a new economy and a new immigrant force.

The Métis' role, as far as the wintering Oblates were concerned, was one of an exemplary ambassador of civilization and Christianity. Closer to the white person in the savage/civilized continuum, the expectation was that the civilization process would be aided by a person that was part white and part Indian. So the insider Oblates relied on the Métis and expected them to function in that capacity. Once conversion, education and sedentarism were achieved, even with limited success, all that remained in the scheme was assimilation. Then, the Métis with their command of both Indian and European languages as well as their prior experience with Christianity were trusted ambassadors.

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[10] PAA, OMI 71.220/5. Papier Mgr. Grandin, Vol 5, "Notes privés sur les missions et les missionnaires. (October 1874), 263.

NOMADISM

The Oblates arrived on the continent with very specific ideas and perspectives which were in part indicative of the time. As they interacted with the Métis, these perspectives sometimes were altered, sometimes were not. But the behaviors that supported their already established ideas about the Indians and the Métis were things couched in the savage/civilized paradigm and ideologies of miscegenation. The behavior that preoccupied them in their efforts to civilize the Indians and the Métis was nomadism or more appropriately trans-humance. Oblate views of nomadism however were altered by a variety of experiences and the context of the writer. Nomadism functions as a case study for understanding how the Métis were judged on the civilization continuum.

The insider Oblate understood the practical reality of the Métis in the middle ground between the European and the Indian. Transhumance, the wintering Oblate understood, was a necessary adaptation to plains life in the mid 19th century as they fulfilled their ambassadorial and exemplary role. Perhaps the Métis were not always even aware of the expectation or receptive to it, but this did not alter the expectation of the Oblate in integrating the Métis into a system whereby he was raised above and became an example for all others to follow.

The nomadic lifestyle was perceived as a threat, by Oblate administrators, to both the survival of the Métis and the progress of the civilization process, as noted by Grandin:

> Cependant, un grand obstacle au bien, c'est l'instabilité de nos Métis, la grande moitié de la population est provisoirement fixée au lac du boeuf vivant de la chasse. Cet éloignement de la population nous met dans l'embarras et nous décourage même.[11]
>
> Meanwhile, a huge obstacle to our good, is the instability of our Métis, more than half of the population is temporarily fixed at Buffalo Lake living off the hunt. This distancing from the population embarasses us and is even very discouraging.

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[11] PAA, OMI 71.220/5. Papier Mgr. Grandin, Vol 5, "Notes privés sur les missions et les missionnaires. (October 1874), 260.

Though the wintering Oblates engaged in a nomadic lifestyle, and believed that it was the best way to maximize conversion and civilization, they nonetheless knew that later, once the buffalo herds vanished and the onslaught of Eastern immigrants hit, that the Métis would be marginalized if they did not adjust. In the meantime, however, wintering priests such as Father Decorby felt that the wintering experience was the ideal medium for the Oblate to convert and save the souls of those lost to the ways of Christianity as it brought many people from many diverse parts of the country, under the umbrella of the missionary.[12] This did not seem to be the case for the administrators such as Vital Grandin and over the years a conflict developed between Mission administrators like Grandin and wintering Oblates such as Decorby. The wintering Oblates maintained that they could best serve the Métis and Indians by being among them, yet by 1874 the entire "mission ambulante" was being questioned. What resulted was a disagreement, an internal contestation of direction and philosophy. Father Lestanc questioned an abandonment of the "mission ambulante." Despite the fasting and rigors of wintering, Lestanc believed the "mission ambulante" to be necessary.[13] What was contested was the usefulness and the integrity of wintering in terms of the civilization imperative and how nomadism affected the imperative. All Oblates believed in the necessity of sedentarism for full civilization, but at this juncture wintering Oblates saw no need for immediate settlement. From their experience the Métis were clearly civilized despite their trans-humance adaptations. As Lestanc's letter to Taché suggests, discussions were serious regarding the option of shutting down all wintering Oblate activities and demanding that they establish mission stations.

As the herds retreated and foreshadowed the coming of settlement, Father Lestanc expressed what all insider Oblates were worried about and urged the Métis to settle down.:

J'ai pressé ces pauvres Métis de prendre des terres dans quelque bonne

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[12] Decorby, 'Les Hivernemants', p. 196.
[13] Letter from Lestanc to Taché, April 6, 1874. Archives of The Historical Society of St. Boniface, Fonds Taché, T14075.

place et ils m'ont promis de s'établir sur la Riviere Bataille. Le feront-ils?[14]

I urged those poor Métis to take land in a few good locations and they promised me they would establish themselves on the Battle River. Will they do it?

Lestanc was expressing concerns for the Métis in light of settlement and the receding buffalo and the Métis' chances of maintaining a way of life. Thus the philosophy of sedentarism with which the wintering Oblate entered the North West shifted over time to accommodate wintering among the Métis , and then in turn shifted again as the economy changed and the buffalo receded. Though the notion of nomadism was not supported per se, it was believed for a time to be the most effective method for access to the Métis and therefore conversion and civilization. But once it became apparent that the buffalo would eventually disappear, the retention of nomadism was seen as increasingly marginalizing the Métis if they did not settle down. With the onslaught of new settlers, the wintering Oblates even began to show concern for the Métis vis-à-vis contact with whites. It appears as though the whites also threatened the religious environment and solidarity that had existed in isolation. Father Decordy stated in 1882 that contact with the 'sauvages' was not nearly as dangerous for the Métis as contact with whites. [15]

Decorby was worried that though the whites were considered more evolved, the incoming groups of English settlers threatened Métis independence, religion, and language. The missionaries were suspect of the white traders and settlers and worried about their negative influence. The demise of the Métis "hivernant" existence prior to the establishment of permanent French and Catholic settlements in the West was considered more dangerous than nomadism. At least in the "hivernant" camps, the Métis had the benefits of tightly knit communities and Catholic instruction. As Father Lestanc notes, there were greater dangers than nomadism.

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[14] Letter from Lestanc to Taché, April 10,1876. Archives of The Historical Society of St. Boniface, Fonds Taché, T17294.

> Je suis heureux d'apprendre, Bien aimé Père, que vous nécéssissez à faire venir des Canadiens français à Manitoba. On dirait que la malédiction est sur nos pauvres Métis qui se dispèrsent au quatre vents du ciel pour toujours errer et ne jamais se fixer.[16]
>
> I am pleased, good father, that you are necessitating the arrival of French Canadians from Manitoba. It is as though a curse is upon our poor Métis who are dispersing with the four winds of the sky and roam about without ever establishing themselves.

It became apparent to the Oblates that their beloved were being threatened, as a people and as a distinct group in the rush of English and Protestant immigration.

HYBRIDITY

From the Oblate perspective, white Europeans were at the apex of the civilization ladder and the path to civilization and optimum functioning was defined by Europe and European ideas of Christianity. The concept of the creation story of Adam and Eve and the notion that civilization was the creator's wish was intertwined in Christian belief.[17] To have fallen from this highest way of being was inherent to the Christian message of the savage living in a lesser state and the clearly delineated path toward full happiness, wisdom and nobler living. In essence, Europeans wished to re-create themselves in the midst of what they considered pagan poverty.

The concept of miscegenation as it was understood in the 1800s was far more than simply mixing of the white with, in this case, the Indian. It was believed that blood held the key ingredients which affected the character traits and behaviors of the particular group in question.[18] For instance, whites were not only behaviorally different and more advanced than Indians, but further, they were so due to the nature of their breeding and the essence of

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[15] Letter from R.P.Decorby to Mgr. Taché, February 10, 1882. Archives of The Historical Society of St. Boniface, Fonds Taché, T26325.
[16] Letter from Lestanc to Taché, September 28, 1876 Archives of The Historical Society of St. Boniface, Fonds Taché, T17899.
[17] Robert J. C Young, Colonial Desire, p. 92.

their make-up. Furthermore, this essence or character was not easily washed away. The impression that emerges from the literally hundreds of letters that come out of the study was the process of miscegenation intrinsically changed the behavior, make-up, and character of the group as it involved mixing one groups blood with anothers'. Thus in the case of the Métis, they would exhibit characteristics that were both white and Indian in derivation because they contained both Indian and white blood. But it was not as though these two were judged as equal in value. Clearly, the white European was superior, civilized, and generally more advanced than the Indian, pagan, nomadic tribes of North America.[19] So two important beliefs collided to create the notion of Métissage. First, that mixing of blood affected character and behavior, and second, that one type of blood had greater status than the other. The Métis, by these criteria, were more advanced than their Indian brothers as they were more white, therefore more evolved. Because of this they were viewed differently.

The Oblate believed that with a combination of some European blood and regular teaching about God, civilization and agricultural lifeways, the Métis would not only become civilized but that they would help civilize the Indian savages. For instance in the Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, published in March of 1883 for distribution in Europe, it was stated that:

> Les élèves métis élevés avec eux et aux mêmes conditions, étant plus aptes à la civilization que les purs sauvages, sont pour nous un moyen d'exciter l'orgueil et l'ambition des autres. Ces sauvages lorsqu'ils se marient ne sont plus sauvages. J'en ai quelques-uns qui sont tout aussi civilisés et cabaples, et souvent plus honnètes que certains étrangers que l'immigration nous envoie.[20]
>
> The Métis students raised with them and in the same conditions, being more apt to civilization than the pure savages, are for us a means of exciting the jealousy and ambition of the others. These savages, once married are no longer savages. I have a few that are just as civilized and capable, and often more honest, than the certain strangers sent to us by immigration.

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[18] Colonial desire, p. 94

[19] Ibid.

[20] Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée, 21 year, No.81-(Mars 1883, Paris), p.129.

This passage exemplifies certain specific beliefs held by the Oblates. First, it was clear that it was commonly accepted among the Oblates that the more European a person was in terms of blood quantum, the more civilized the person could be. But as we will see later this was not the only perspective. Second, the Oblates differentiated the Métis from the Indians and in fact attempted to incite jealousy of the Métis' preferred position to win the commitment of the Indian. Finally, the Métis were portrayed as living proof of the success of the mission and remained a great encouragement to the Oblates.

The concept of the Métis being closer to a European ideal was only one of many ways of placing the Métis in the savage/civilized continuum and within concepts of racial theory and hybridity. But in terms of the Métis being considered by the Oblates as closer to the European standard, this was only one of many ways the Métis, or for that matter peoples of mixed backgrounds, were viewed. Racial theory and hybridity had long been debated among scholars, ethnologists, anthropologists and historians throughout the period and from these discussions many views were formulated.

One view argued that human origins were polygenist-that is derived from several independent pairs of ancestors. A white person, it was argued, was as different in origin and make-up from a black person, as a dog is different from a cat. By this argument, the human race had evolved from different species which were developing along their own continuum. Polygenism also allowed the ordering of each of the races according to a European standard which placed white people at the top and black people at the bottom of the pecking order. From this notion it was rationalized that a determined hierarchy in race predisposed certain groups to ruling and overpowering other weaker races. One race would not effectively mix with another without the more advanced race degenerating. This theory asserted that, not unlike a caste system, each had its place and therefore, any notions of advancement or encouragement from that caste was futile. Each race evolved at its own rate and in its own fashion.

For polygenists the mixing of races would develop into one of two possible outcomes: either the degeneration of the superior race, or each subsequent mixed generation would slowly die off as offspring of unlike races were thought to be infertile. This concept was based on notions of hybridity of various plant forms and the probability of survival among offspring of mixed species. If in fact the white person was as different in species from the Black person as say a cat from a dog, the likelihood, was that their offspring would not survive.[21]

This theory of race allowed the systematic marginalization of many non-European peoples and fostered concepts that colonized people were not human in the same sense as whites. But missionaries coming to the New world to Christianize aboriginal population functioned within a different point of view. In order to convert and tame the savage, they maintained that development and civilization was within the perview of the savage.

> Si on ne considerait ces pauvres gens qu'au point de vue des attraits naturels, on se sentirait peu porte à vivre parmi eux; revêtus de peaux de bête qui leur donnent je ne sais quelle ressemblance avec les animaux qu'ils chassent dans les bois, couverts de vermine, sans aucun principe de la plus élémentaire education, ils n'ont rien en eux-mêmes qui attire; que de pauvres sauvages vivent ainsi dans l'immense vicariat de Mgr. Faraud! Mais si la foi déchire ces voiles, on aperçoit des âmes rachetées par le sang de Jesus-Christ, encore toutes neuves et aptes à reçevoir les lumineux enseignements de notre religion. Les repugnancesse changent en attraits, et ces natures honnêtes se corrigent bientôt au contact du prêtre.[22]
>
> If we were to only consider these people in terms of their natural attractions, we would feel little desire to live among them; clothed in skins of beasts gives them the appearance of the animals they hunt in the woods, covered in vermin, without any principles of basic education, they have nothing about them that attracts, that poor savages live in the huge vicariat of MGR. Faraud!. But if faith tears away this veil, we notice souls repurchased by the blood of Jesus Christ, renewed again and apt to receive the enlightenment of our religion. Their repugnances become attractions, and their natural honesty is corrected by contact with the priest.

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[21] Robert J.C. Young, Colonial Desire p.101.

[22] Letter from R.P. Pascal, Mission of Notre Dame des Septs douleurs, December 10, 1879. Missions de la Congregation des Missionaires de Marie Immaculée, no 69.

This belief in the possibility of improvement put the Oblates in the monogenist camp. Monogenism asserted that all humans were derived from a single pair of ancestors, as the Biblical story of Adam and Eve attested. But all races were not equal in condition and ability, but all, with the help of the more evolved races, could attain the highest standards of humanity. Though the notion was paternal at best, it nonetheless allowed for development and options where polygenism destined certain groups to nothing more than a lifetime of slavery. Monogenism was also hierarchical with the white European at the apex and the uncivilized people of the conquered lands at the bottom, but there was still hope that the savages would become civilized- even 'white'. Father MacCuckin, while at St. Joseph, noted:

> Pendant les cinq dernières années nos enfants, dans une proportion de 36 pour 100, ont reçu gratuitement l'éducation, la nourriture, le blanchissage, et quelques-uns même le vêtement.[23]
>
> During the last five years our children, in a proportion of 36 of 100 have freely received education, food, whitening, and a few even clothes.

The Oblates through the period in question maintained a positive attitude about the Métis and the Indian in that their stance was monogenist and monogenism allowed for development toward the ideal type. But not all missionaries or travelers held the same view. In fact, in the United States, a shift in theoretical perspective from a monogenist to a polygenist view was evident and had serious consequences for both policy and attitude toward the Métis and the Indians. The American attitude shifted, by the 1820s, from one of positive beliefs to a more negative perspective of the Indians and their capabilities toward civilization. As discouragement grew, so did unfavorable views of mixed-bloods and mixed marriages and the government and public began viewing the Indian and 'mixed-bloods' as innately inferior and bound for extinction. In this view, the Métis were not viewed as

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[23] Letter from Mac-Cuckin to Martinet, Saint Joseph, November 27, 1878. Missions de la Congrègation des Missionnaires de Marie Immaculées. (emphasis mine)

ambassadors of civilization and 'white' development, but rather as faulty and destined to nothing more than the savagery of the Indian.[24]

Such a shift in theory and practice did not occur in the Canadian North West among the Oblates; their monogenist views held strong. It would be interesting to speculate as to the reasons for this steadfast view. Perhaps their insider perspective as members of the Métis community and their first hand experiences would not allow such a shift in values and perspective. Nonetheless, the Oblates maintained that the Indian could be transformed and that the Métis had a significant role in helping the Indian evolve, even though the entire process seemed more difficult and longer than what had been anticipated. But this monogenism was fundamental to the construction of Métis identity because without a positive view of the transformability of the Indian, there remained no hope for the Métis, who were part Indian. But given this mongenist view, what was to be the future of the Métis according to the Oblate construction? Though the Métis served an invaluable purpose at this time in history for the greater Oblate and government mission, what was the logical conclusion to the Oblate construction of the Métis 'other'? What was to become of the Métis? Did the Oblates believe that they would simply be assimilated into a greater francophone Canadian identity or would they persist as Métis? Perhaps that depended on whether the Oblate was an insider or an outsider and at what time in the history of the Métis were investigated. From my research, there was no clear indication of what the Oblates in this study believed.

The Métis enjoyed the praise and support of the Oblates, and were looked upon to fulfill an ambassadorial role. But the view of some Oblates was also ambivalent . Mgr. Taché, who had spent many years among the Métis and had also served as Archbishop at Saint Boniface had by the late 1860s become somewhat judgmental:

Les métis sont une race de beaux hommes, grands, forts, bien faits; quoique

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[24] Robert Bieder,"Scientific Attitudes Towards Indian Mixed Bloods in Early Nineteenth Century America" The Journal of Ethnic Studies (Summer 1980), p. 21-27.

> en général ils aient le teint basané, cependant un très-grand nombre sont bien blancs et ne portent aucune trace de provenance sauvage. Les métis sont intrèpides et infatigables voyageurs; ils étonnent par leur force et leur agilité. Dans les voyages d'hiver, ils courent habituellement paraissent rarement en epreuver meme de la fatigue...Les métis semblent possèder naturellement une faculté propre aux sauvages, et que les autres peuples n'acquièret presque jamais: c'est la facilité de se guider a travers la forèts et les prairies, sans autres donnée qu'une connaissance d'ensemble, qui est insuffisante à toute autre et dont ils ne savent pas toujours se rendre compte à eux-memes.[25]
>
> The half-breeds are a race of handsome men, large, strong and well made; although generally swarthy, a great many of them are very fair, showing no sign of Indian extraction. The half-breeds are intrepid and indefatigable travelers, and their strength and agility are surprising. In their winter journeys they usually run , and rarely show signs of fatigue. . . The half-breeds appear to possess an instinct peculiarly Indian, and which other people hardly ever possess; it is the power to steer across forests and prairies without any information other than the knowledge of the generally of the country which is insufficient for all others, and they cannot always satisfactorily explain their power themselves.

The Oblates believed that the Métis possessed special skills and qualities due to their hybrid nature, being part Indian and part European. The aforementioned quote focused on the skills derived from their Indian traits. But negative side of their hybridity brought with it the less favorable traits, those more associated with the Indian's less positive traits. Vital Grandin, an outsider to the wintering experience, was very critical of their character. For instance, he believed that:

> Les moeurs des sauvages des prairies, encore infidèles, sont très-mauvaises, et cela tient surtout à deux causes difficiles à guèrir: 1. oisiveté: vivant, au jour le jour, du produit de leur chasse, les sauvages ne songent à autre choses qu'à jouer et fumer, à moins que la faim ne les prèsse de chasser les buffles; 2. l'état d'agglomèration dans lequel se trouvent réunies tant de personnes qui ne sont retenues par aucun sentiment de religion, de pudeur et de crainte.[26]
>
> The mores of the prairie savages, still infidels, are very bad, and this is held true by two causes difficult to cure: 1. idleness: living, day to day, from the products of the hunt, the savages think of nothing else but playing and smoking, unless hunger forces them to hunt the buffalo; 2. the state of groupings that they find themselves gathered in with so many people not held together by any sentiment of religion, modesty and fear.

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[25] Mgr. Taché, Sketches of the North-West of America, (John Lovell: Montreal, 1870), p. 99.

[26] Vital Grandin, Missions of the Vicariat of Saskatchewan, Sept 1868. Missions de la Congrégation des Oblats de Marie Immaculé, no 27, p. 245.

The worry of Oblate administrators was that if the Métis were left to live as the Indians did, sooner or later they would resort back to more savage behaviors. These views however were not monolithic among the Oblates. For the wintering Oblates, there was no question of any regression to the Indian way, and the bigger threat was that of Eastern immigration.

All Oblates believed, however, that racial mixing produced a series of character traits and general attitudes and inasmuch as certain positive traits were identified, so too were less endearing ones. The primary trait identified and believed to be specific to the Métis was the trait of inconstance. The Oblates asserted that by their very nature mixed bloods, given their immediate position between the European and the Indian, were inconstant, ambivalent, prone to fickleness. But further, this inconstance was derived from their Indian heritage as the Indians were also changeable.

> De ces unions est sortie la belle et robuste nation des métis francais ou *natifs*, peuple jovial, entrprenant, valeureux comme ses pères; excellent chasseur, ami de la liberté et inconstant comme les Peaux-Rouges.[27]
>
> Of these unions came about the beautiful and robust nation of French Métis, or natives, a happy people, enterprising, valorous like their fathers; excellent hunters, friends of freedom and inconstant like the red-skins.

The other faults of the Métis that were believed to derive from hybridity are clearly evident in Mgr. Taché's Sketch of the North-West of America. Taché, the Bishop of St. Boniface, had spent many years among the Métis and for this reason one might consider him an insider but, for the opposite reasons of having spent many years as an administrator, he was also an outsider. His description of the Métis, published in 1870, sounds more like Vital Grandin, an outsider to wintering. Taché states without hesitation and in contrast to his earlier more positive assessment that,

> The most striking fault of the Half-breeds appears to me to be the ease with

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[27] R.P Petitot, "Memoire Abregée sur la Geographie de L'Athabaskaw-Mackenzie et des Grands Lacs du Basin Arctique de l'Amérique," Missions de la Congregation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculées, tome 13, (1875), p. 142.

> which they resign themselves to the allurements of pleasure. Of lively disposition, ardent and playful, gratification is a necessity to them, and if a source of pleasure presents itself they sacrifice everything for its enjoyment. Hence a great waste of time, and disregard, often too easy, of important duties; hence frivolity and unsteadiness of character which appear to be the natural index of graver vices than those with which they can truly be charged.
>
> This love of enjoyment too often makes them drunkards, they drink to amuse themselves, and yet, almost invariably, drunkenness deprives them of their ordinary gentleness and drives them to deplorable excess. Drunkenness, in the case of most of those giving themselves up to it, is madness. They scream, they shout, they fight, they tear themselves and then they drop tears of remorse. Love of pleasure necessarily does away with self-constraint. Work is too much of a restraint, and too often there is indolence. They lounge about seeking pleasure when they hope to meet with gratification, and again they lounge about that they may enjoy doing nothing. [28]

But in reviewing this assessment of the Métis character several things need to be understood. First, the Oblate outsider believed that personality and character traits were partially attributed to the blood that ran through the veins. For instance, the indolence in the Métis was no different than the indolence among the Indians; in fact it was derivative of the Indian. Next, many of the characteristics, once the construction is unpacked, were a result of the lifestyle on the plains, so vastly different from any other lifestyle the Oblate had ever known. The incessant desire of the Oblate to transform the Métis and Indian into civilized and sedentary members of what he would consider a normalized way of life caused a value judgment to be placed on a lifestyle that was necessary on the plains. Finally, Mgr. Taché, realized that the nomadic and indolent lifestyle of the Métis would not handle the coming and unnegotiable lifestyle foreshadowed by Eastern immigration. The Oblates knew that the Métis were at a serious disadvantage.

In contrast, a text written by Jules Decorby, a wintering Oblate called 'les hivernements' illuminates and highlights the nuances and differences between the insider and outsider perspectives.[29] Father Decorby, in 1879, wrote a lengthy description of the

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[28] Mgr. Taché, Sketches of the North West of America, p. 102-103.

[29] This text was also one of the few very specific texts written about the Métis wintering experiences and winterers which was disseminated among the Missions publications.

Métis in their wintering communities as well as a description of his role among them. In his seven page description of the hunt, the activities of the missionary and life on the plains, Father Decorby addresses the issues of civilization, nomadism and hybridity in such a way as to exemplify the subtle difference of Métis construction within the Oblate order. In terms of civilization, Decorby stated that the Métis constructed houses that were far from 'rough' or uncivilized and that they in fact exhibited high levels of civilization in the nature of their homes and their cleanliness. Furthermore, he stated that in the past adventurers were afraid to tread among the 'savages' but that now many group together in order to hunt. The uncivilized nature of the plains had changed. Wintering communities usually had a church where the faithful gathered, and the entire party functioned as a village in which the missionary had unending access to the children and those in need of God's message.

The primary difference between the works of Father Decorby and Mgr. Taché was that Decorby expressed a complete description of the wintering experience, the Métis, and the missionaries role without ever even once criticizing or judging the Métis as anything less than the great hunters and the great people that he believed them to be. In contrast, the nine pages written by Mgr. Taché in the Sketches of the North West, contained both positive descriptions and a very critical, character-based assessment of the Métis. These two examples were not simply two different people with different opinions. They function as indicators as to how insider Oblates were constructing the Métis 'other' and how outsider Oblates were also creating the Métis 'other'. This variance points to the effect that the wintering experience had on the way the Oblates viewed the Métis.

The conflict between the insider view and the outsider view was only resolved with the end of the wintering experience and camps. The disappearance of the buffalo made wintering a thing of the past, and the influx of white settlement forced more permanent settlement or dispersion. In a sense the resolution of the conflict within the order was resolved by these two factors. But the construction of a different Métis identity within the Oblate order was only resolved when certain voices or sources were marginalized and others

given priority. Interpretations and perspectives concerning the Métis were predominantly disseminated by the administrators and these sources were the most widely distributed. Therefore, the sources written by insider Oblates were marginalized and the administrative arm of the Oblates controlled which sources would be published for European consumption and which would not. Therefore, the insider perspective was minimized and the outsider perspective became the packaged perspective of the Oblate order.

The larger themes of civilization/savagery, nomadism and hybridity concerning the character of the Métis were prevalent in all Oblate sources. The themes were integral to Oblate goals in the new land and they were fundamental to the civilizing and Christianizing focus of the missionary abroad. But within the body of Oblate sources, there were significant differences. Though each Oblate was concerned with civilization, hybridity, and nomadism, not all Oblates were privy to the wintering experiences of Alexis André, Albert Lacombe, Jules Decorby, Jean-Marie LeFloc'h, and Jean-Marie Lestanc. These five experienced the Métis and their goals within the Métis community as insiders. Their constructions of the discursive 'other' were altered by the very context of wintering. The wintering Oblates loved their Métis and they constructed this Métisness in a kinder, less judgmental, more positive way. As Father Jean-Marie Lestanc vehemently noted in 1878 while at Rivière La Biche, "Ce pays à été ouvert par les missionnaires et par les Métis et c'est par les missionnaires et les Métis que le gouvernement pourra se maintenir et se consolider."[30](This country was opened by the missionaries and the Métis and it is by the missionaries and the Métis that the government will be able to maintain and consolidate it.)

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[30] Letter from Lestanc to Mgr. Taché, Rivière La Biche, December 28, 1878, Archives of The Historical Society of St. Boniface, Fonds Taché, T21152.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Sometime between 1875 and 1884 Louis Riel wrote a Mémoire named "Les trois principaux défauts des Métis du Montana." In this piece, Riel identified three principal faults of the Métis that might well have been written by the Oblates.

> Comme tel, il a, de grands défaults. Mais je ne veux ici faire attention qu'à trois de ces défaults parce qu'ils me semblent être les plus saillants de leur caractére. Et leur analyse sera comme une clef qui nous aidera à ouvrir plusieurs des secréts qui font de leur situation une sorte d'énigme.
>
> 1. Les métis manquent d'économie.
> 2. Ils sont insoucieux du lendemain.
> 3. Ils sont indolents.[1]
>
> As they are, they have many faults. But here I want to draw attention to three faults because they seem to be the most prominent in their character. And the analysis will be like a key that will help us open up several secrets of their enigmatic situation.
>
> 1. The Métis lack economic know how.
> 2. They are not concerned about the future.
> 3. They are indolent.

More than fifty years later, Auguste Henri De tremaudan wrote the Histoire de la Nation Métisse dans l'ouest du Canada in which he takes a similar position in relation to the character of the Métis. Though the book deals with the entire history of the Métis to 1885 and more contemporary challenges facing the Métis, it nonetheless comments on the beginnings and the basic nature of the Métis. De Tremaudan states :

> Les Métis était essentiellement nomade, autant par sa mére habituée à la vie libre des plaines, que par son père, friand de courses et d'aventures. Il supportait mal la vie sédentaire, en dépit du confort de son habitation ou de la fertilité de sa ferme. Le travail de la terre n'avait aucun charme pour lui. L'idée de faire pousser des céréales ou des légumes, enbrisant le sol sous la proche au la ou la charrue, ne lui disait rien. . . . Ses instincts maternels l'entrainaient souvent à vivre sous la tente et à transporter toiture, bagages et provisions là où sa fantaisie le dirigeait. C'est au sein meme de la grande nature, libre de respirer à pleine poumons l'air vivfiant, de lancer aux échos des immensités qui l'entouraient les notes vibrantes des chansons, héritage des aieux paternels, que le Métis donnait le plus aisément libre cours à son

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[1] Louis Riel, "Les trois principales défauts des Métis de Montana," The Collected Writings of Louis Riel, Volume 2, 1875-1884, Edited by Gilles Martel, (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1985), p.406.

exubérance et à sa gaieté.[2]

> The Métis were essentially nomadic, as much by their mother, accustomed to the free life of the plains, as by their father, partial to adventures and excursions. He did not cope well with the sedentary life, despite the comfort of his home or the fertility of his farm. The work of the soil had absolutely no appeal to him. The idea of growing grain or vegetables, while breaking the soil close beneath him with a plough, meant nothing to him. . . . His maternal instincts often drove him to live underneath a tent and to transport his lodging, baggage and supplies wherever his fantasy took him. It was within the breast of the mother earth, free to breath deeply with his lungs the invigorating air, to throw his echo into the immense expanse and sing a song with vibrant notes of the heritage of his paternal forefathers, that the Métis found his free and easy life which explained his gaiety and exuberance.

It was clear that Tremaudan believed the Métis to be nomadic by nature and primitive in their development toward civilization. After all, the Métis were only one generation removed from the 'sauvagesse'[3] or savage mother.

A similar, though more negative, portrayal of the Métis is Marcel Giraud's Le Métis Canadien.[4] Giraud concludes that the Métis were primitive and incapable of adapting to the incursion of civilization and that they were ultimately doomed to disappear. The Métis, in his view, were not far-sighted enough to worry about the future and they were less capable of dealing with the impending changes than were white settlers. This particular view seemed to be derived from the notion that the Métis had perhaps inherited some of the less enviable characteristics of their Indian mothers. Nomadism remained a clear definer of civilization, or the lack thereof. These three descriptions, though differing somewhat in their evaluation of Métis characteristics, all adopted the racialized terminology and themes first enunciated and promoted by the Oblate Fathers of the Northwest. This construction of Métis identity, one that portrayed an indolent, less industrious and even foolhardy Métis, is reminiscent of the very construction which was discovered in this research. The body of Oblate records most

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[2] Auguste Henri de Tremaudan, Histoire de la Nation Métisse dans l'ouest du Canada, (Canada: Éditions Albert Lévesque, 1935), p.49-50.
[3] Ibid., p.33.

disseminated and examined by historians specializing in this area were published with the permission of the administrating fathers: Mgr. Taché and Vital Grandin. This construction dominated and was re-introduced within the works of De Tremaudan's L'Histoire de la Nation Métisse and Marcel Giraud's foundational work about the Métis. What becomes clear is a feedback loop which began with the Oblate fathers and their initial constructions of the Métis.

During the course of this investigation of the 'geneology' of this more negative construction of 'Métisness' in Oblate writings, however, it was discovered that these views were not uncontested. At the center of the Oblate archive there existed a differentiation in the construction of what we would call the Métis 'other'. The construction which became prevalent and predominant was similar to that construction adopted by Louis Riel, Marcel Giraud and Auguste Henri de Trémaudan. It was generally more negative in its construction of the Métis, it had fewer words of praise, and if it was praising it was always juxtaposed to its more negative characteristics. This negative construction emerged as the construction of the "outsider" Oblate.

The "insider" construction was much more nuanced and positive. For the Oblate Fathers involved in the "mission ambulante" and living with the Plains Métis in their wintering communities, nomadism or transhumance was less a character flaw than a necessary adaptation to economic circumstances. As part of the community, the Fathers were affected by the dangers of the hunt and they were always involved in prayer and preparation for the hunt. If a hunter was successful in the hunt, he had to further survive the incessant threat of attack from the Sioux and the Blackfoot. Wintering parties established camps deeper and deeper into contested territory with the retreat of the buffalo. In so doing, the winterers were under attack from hostile bands whose lands they were encroaching. Though the wintering parties successfully fended off any Indian attacks, the required

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[4] Marcel Giraud, Le Métis Canadien, 2 Vols (St. Boniface: Les Éditions de Blé, 1984).

vigilance was at once exciting and dangerous. The climate posed a series of challenges on its own. Once an appropriate spot for the hunting, proper protection from the elements, and adequate contiguous wood supplies were established, it still remained to build and fashion appropriate housing. Furthermore, large hunting parties were established to fend off would be Indian attacks, yet these large parties lacked the social cohesion of Indian bands with several generations of kinship ties keeping everyone in check. The missionary played the important role of creating social cohesion among Métis whose family links were no more than one or two generations. The challenges faced by both the Métis and their itinerant fathers created a milieu where bonds were forged and relationships were heightened.

The climate and experience provided the context, but the Oblates themselves were very special, even within their own group of missionaries. Fathers Albert Lacombe, Jules Decorby, Jean-Marie Lestanc, Alexis André and Jean-Marie LeFloc'h were exceptional in that they viewed the wintering lifestyle as a potentially effective means of converting and instructing the Métis. Moreover, mission life was difficult, cold, and demanding; winter on the plains was exponentially more difficult and demanding. Yet these five particular fathers were enticed into creating an ambulant mission among the Métis between the 1840s and 1870s which effectively allowed them to instruct, convert and ultimately understand the Métis hunters.

Writings from the 'insider' perspective ceased with the retreat and disappearance of the plains buffalo and the consequent end of the wintering communities. Yet the perceptions of the Oblates about the Métis which were established during these wintering experiences did not. The story of the Plains Métis, at this time, took a turn. But what persisted were the letters written by these wintering Oblate fathers and their distinctive views of their beloved Métis. Within this body of letters, a different view of the Métis emerged than found in those letters written by standard mission Oblates. The 'insiders' to the wintering experience were much more positive in their construction and understanding of the Métis. In each of the investigated themes of civilization, hybridity, and nomadism, the wintering Oblates

adopted a more praiseworthy view and thus constructed a different Métis identity. On the other hand, the materials written by 'outsiders' to the wintering camps were more likely to include criticisms and negative aspects of the Métis lifestyle, behavior and character. Under scrutiny, these 'outsider' letters under the same themes of nomadism, civilization and hybridity exhibited a negative, almost derogatory tone as a construction of the Métis.

The contestation of the Métis 'other' was discursive, but it had as its context the reality of the wintering lifestyle and the "Mission ambulante." It was true that some Oblate fathers disagreed with and did not support the active wintering among the hunters. "Outsider" Oblates believed that wintering undermined the basic goals of the mission by encouraging and aiding in continued nomadism. Nomadism was often considered, especially by the 'outsider' Oblates, to be nearer to savagery than to civilization as they understood it. For the wintering "insider" Oblates, however, nomadism or transhumance was not the ideal, but was a necessary adaptation for the Métis. For the wintering Oblates, the Mission Ambulante was even a positive context which allowed sustained contact with their Métis parishioners during which time they would educate, civilize, and acculturate the Métis to a new way of life. Wintering was not associated with "savagery" as it was for the "outsider" Oblates, but rather with community. A greater threat than nomadism, for the wintering Oblates, was the dispersion of these communities if their missions were withdrawn. The assimilation of the Métis into Indian bands or Protestant white settlements was considered a far greater danger than the transhuman lifestyle.

The mixed ancestry of the Métis for "outsider" Oblates explained Métis character flaws and the problems in "civilizing" them and their difficulty in adopting sedentary lifestyles. Hybridity for the "insider" Oblate was a positive development from which the Métis derived enhanced skills. They were both skilled woodsman and navigators as well as very bright and capable students of language, religion, and whatever new skill required learning. In the context of the moving mission of Oblate Fathers that accompanied the Métis on their wintering hunting expeditions, the Oblate was accepted and even desired as a

member of the hunting party and community. In the works written by Oblate fathers who wintered among the Métis, the descriptions of the Métis are full of praise and respect. According to these hivernant priests, the Plains Métis were excellent hunters and woodsmen, they were kind and generous, they could manage any kind of crisis of climate, they were fun-loving, and they were respected by their ambulant fathers.

The letters written by wintering Oblates told a different story of the Métis, but these portrayals were subsumed by the more widely circulated writings of Oblates who were not central to wintering. The writings of the 'insider' Oblates were controlled by the Oblate administration and only those writings which concurred with standard perceptions were published and sent abroad. But it was not as though the administrators in question consciously excluded material that did not support their notions of the Métis, but rather that materials written and disseminated abroad had a different focus, audience and therefore a different purpose. Letters written by wintering 'insider' were written for internal use. The letters written about the mission and its success which were distributed, were designed to encourage and keep the mission alive. To gain support for missions among the Métis, the Métis had to be savage. The audience determined the content and tone. Even if those insider letters had been distributed, the tone and construction would not have been discernible through one or two letters. It was the in-depth study of a large body of letters written in a specific context that created the means of comparing the 'insider' to the 'outsider' Oblates.

Many of these materials written by wintering Oblates in the Mission Ambulante have not been utilized by historians writing about the Métis. This thesis has tried to identify these writings and provide an alternative view of the Métis which has not yet received due notice. Those Oblate writings that received wide distribution in Europe and Canada are the ones that have been utilized by historians. The "outsider" constructions have created a feedback loop that exists even among some Métis views of themselves. Though the exhaustive study of the Métis published and written in the 1940s by Giraud used an assortment of sources, it nonetheless adopted and reflected the more general interpretations

of the Métis established by the writings of the dominant "outsider" Oblates. Accordingly, the "outsider" view was established and legitimated as the truth about the Métis despite the fact that it was not the only Oblate construction of the Métis 'other'.

The significance of this missed body of work, the wintering 'insider' Oblate construction, is that no competing alternative existed to question the constructions of the Métis once the period of contestation between the Oblate Fathers was resolved. It was easier to assume that existing views of the Métis were in fact immutable truths rather than constructed interpretations. The main purpose in unpacking the Oblate construction of Métis identity was to highlight another version of the Métis, based in the wintering camps and written by wintering Fathers. This lost version which carried a much more positive view of the plains Métis remained hidden from full view and was therefore unable to contest the dominant, less favorable construction.

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